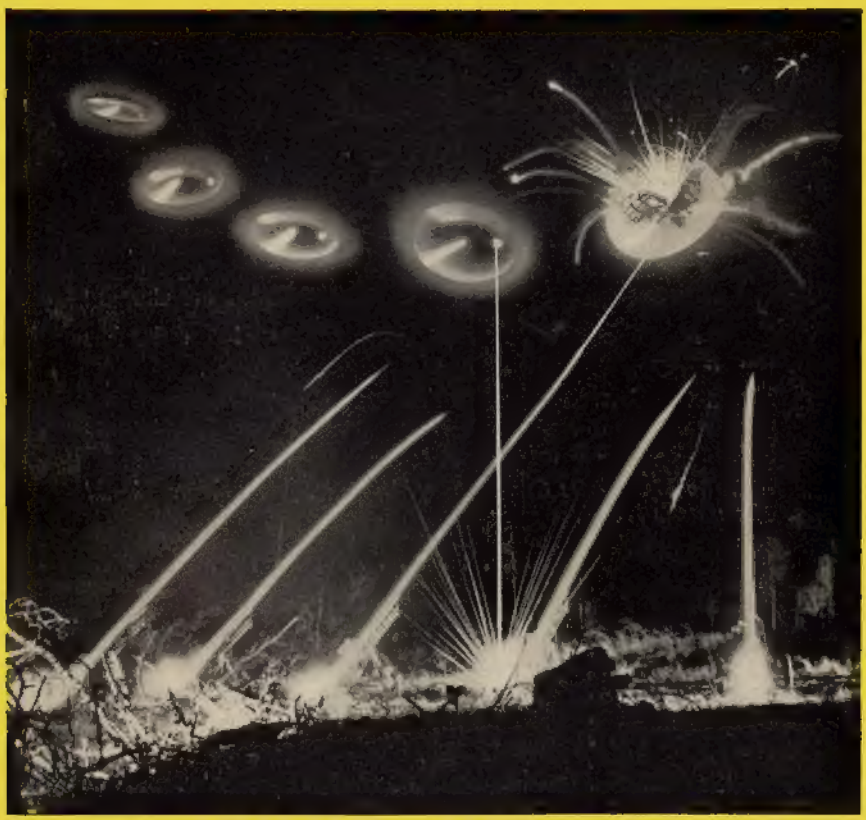
November 1954 35¢

Universe

SCIENCE FICTION



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NOVEMBER 1954
Issue No. 8

UNIVERSE
SCIENCE FICTION

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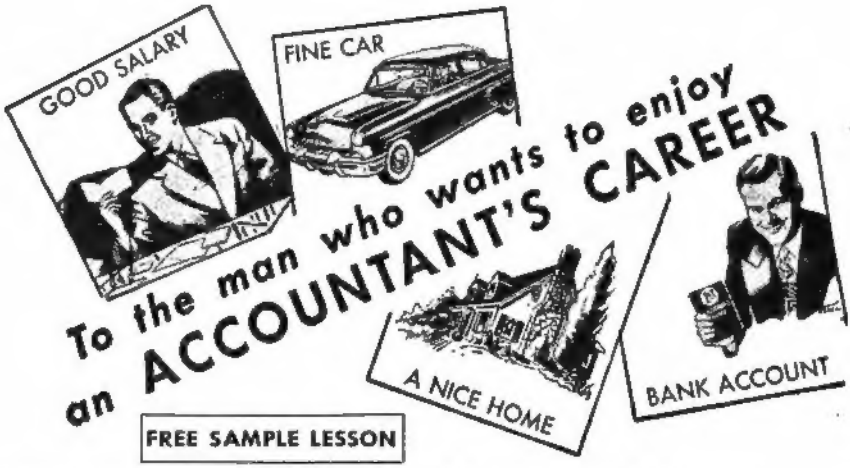
BEA MAHAFFEY

Please address all correspondence to Universe, Amherst, Wisc.

Universe is published bi-monthly by Palmer Publications, Inc., 806 Dempster St., Evanston, Illinois. Entered as second-lass matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Amherst, Wisconsin. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio applied for. No responsibility is undertaken for manuscripts, photographs or art-work submitted. Return envelope and postage is required. Advertising representative: Space Associates, 114 E. 32nd St., New York 16, N.Y. Subscriptions: 12-issues $3.00; 24-issues $6.00. Copyright 1954 by Palmer Publications, Inc., Printed in U.S.A.



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With the temperature flitting around the 100 degree mark it's a little difficult to concentrate on writing an editorial. You resent the fact that you're chained to your typewriter while all around you people are dashing off to swimming pools, baseball games, golf courses or air-conditioned movies. You fume and fret, and finally work yourself into such a mood that you choose one of your more violent science-fiction likes or dislikes and write a lot of hot-headed (no pun intended) remarks that you'll probably regret later.

Swimming pools, baseball games or golf courses seldom provide topics for editorials, or facilities for writing them. But air-conditioned movies—there's an idea I might be able to use. Not that I expect to pack up my typewriter and paper and head for the nearest movie—that might not work out so well. I've got to be a little more practical, give it more thought.

There is, nearby, a little neighborhood theater. It seldom has first-run movies; in fact it's anywhere from a month to a year after a movie comes out that it reaches this particular theater. But consider the factors in its favor—it's near at hand, air-conditioned, has a smoking lounge, soft-drink dispensors, and a refreshment counter with a fabulous display of candy and popcorn.

As yet, I'll admit, none of this is in anyway connected with science-fiction. But there is a tie-in, one that justifies my deserting the office and heading for the movies.

The other day I entered the air-conditioned comfort of the theater, purchased a supply of popcorn and candy and settled back to watch *The Creature From The Black Lagoon.* This is one of the current crop of Hollywood-type science-fiction movies making the rounds. Wandering in and out of the movie were two Dedicated Scientists (one South American with heavy accent and one American), two Handsome Scientists (one Hero and one Semi-villian), one Beautiful Girl Scientist, one Monster (amphibious), and assorted South American natives (frightened). Basically, this is the story of the discovery, by one of the Dedicated Scientists, of a fossilized hand that

isn't what it should be nor where it should be. He persuades the rest of the cast to join him in an expedition to the Amazonian Backwoods to seek more of these fossils. Instead of fossilized specimens they runacross a living one—the Monster, no less. Then the fun begins. One scientist wants to kill the Monster, while the rest of them want to capture and study it; the Monster wants to kill the scientists and capture the girl; the natives that haven't been killed as yet want to leave the Black Lagoon before it's too late; and the girl divides her time between swimming gaily in the dangerous lagoon and modeling the latest in jungle attire—playsuits and swimsuits.

This is a rather facetious report of the movie, and in all honesty, I'll have to admit that my reactions were a little different while watching it. It's easy enough to point out the Hollywoodisms now, but at the time not a few involuntary shudders traveled along my spine as the monster slithered in and out of the seaweed or crept silently toward an unsuspecting victim. Those of you who used to enjoy the old Boris Karlof or Bela Lugosi movies will find some of the nostalgic thrills and chills that have been missing in recent movies present in *The Monster From The Black Lagoon.*

So, if the temperature continues to soar, I'll return to my air-conditioned haven (all in the line of duty, of course) to view (*Catwomen of the Moon, Them,* and *Rocket Man.* By that time the heatwave should have broken, or Hollywood will release a new batch of science-fiction movies, or — more likely—Rap will be yelling for me to mind to the magazine instead of the movies.—*Bea*

I keep telling Bea how cool it is in Wisconsin, and what a wonderful place to live, but she just keeps yakking about Cincinnati. So, Bea old girl, swelter if you must; it's your fault! Beginning next issue, Bea and I are going to collaborate on this editorial. We got a few comments about editorials from readers, saying beauty and brains should go together, so from now on, I will supply the beauty, and she will handle the brains. This issue, these last few lines are just to fill up the page, as we are late going to press, and an ad just came in and spoiled our original plans for beginning on the inside front cover as is our habit. But there may not even be a page to fill, in which case, she can chuck this where it belongs!—*Rap.*

NO SPECIES ALONE

By Tom Godwin

There have been many stories written of alien invasions and Earth-saving heroes, some say too many. In this story, however, Earth is again in danger, but there's no hero to go to the rescue, which leaves everything up to Susie . . .

Illustrated by Lawrence

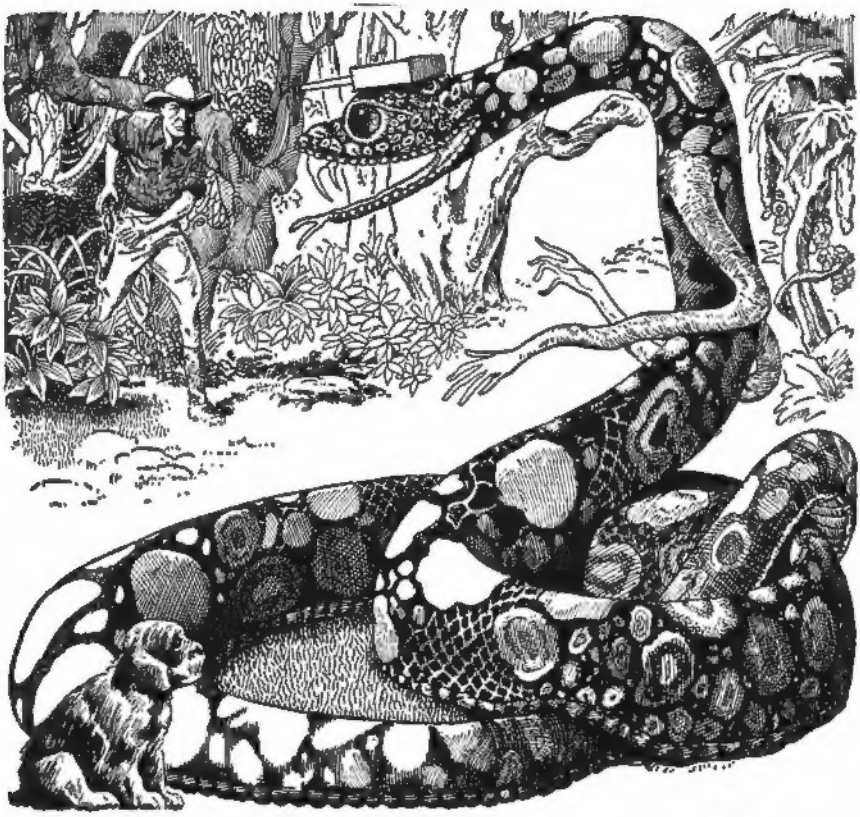
THE morning was, to Jim Hart, exactly like any other June morning but for the presence of Gwen—eight weeks was not yet long enough for him to take her as fully for granted as he would in the months and years to come. She hummed to herself as she finished wiping the breakfast dishes.

Out on the porch Susie and six of her kittens, having just lapped up their own breakfast, were engaged in the after-meal practice of making themselves neat and clean as is the manner of cats. The sky was a flawless sapphire blue with the touch of the sun as warm and gentle as a benediction while the meadowlarks filled the air with their soft melodies.

There was nothing about the morning's soft beauty to presage sudden and vicious peril.

He checked to make sure he had his surveying compass as he stood in the doorway then glanced across the brush-and-tree-dotted flat that extended to the mouth of the canyon a thousand feet away. There the flat broke abruptly along the high, steep bank, a trail leading from the cabin to the break. There was no sign of the pup along the trail which meant Flopper had gone on up the canyon—he had made so many trips to the uranium prospect that spring that Flopper knew as well as he where they were going for the day.

Gwen wiped the last dish and



came over to stand beside him, her head leaned against his shoulder.

"So it's off for the day you go again." She sighed. "I'm glad this is the last day of it."

"Less than a day—I'll be back by noon. Also, from now on we're all set—I found that uranium myself and it's good. My company will take it without a doubt and then I'll be a well-to-do uranium property owner rather than just an employed mining engineer. Doesn't that sound like a bright and pleasant future for us?"

"It sounds wonderful," she agreed. "You can be home all the time and every young wife should have a man around the place—preferably her husband. And another thing—" She looked at the cat and kittens. "If you

had to go back to work and they sent you off to South America or somewhere—what would become of *them?"*

"You gave yourself responsibilities when you picked them up," "You shouldn't have been so soft-hearted. "Poor little things—out by this lonely road and it's raining and they're cold and hungry and have no home." That's what you said, and now we have to buy a case of canned milk every month for them. If I had my *own* way —"

"You did." She pointed out sweetly. "You said, 'Don't just stand there—let's load 'em in the car and be going.' "

"Well—" He considered his defense. "I was weak that night."

"And the pup, Flopper?" she demanded.

"Another weak spell—like the day I finally consented to marry you."

"*You* consented?" She straightened with indignation. "*You* consented?"

"Mm-hmm." He nodded with grave seriousness. "I felt sorry for you."

"Why, you—you—" She stuttered, and tried again. "*You* consented? You—"

"Please, Gwen, do you have to keep repeating everything I tell you, over and over?"

"*You* told me—I didn't—I mean —*oh!*" She struck a small fist against his arm. "You're just trying to make me mad again—why are you always doing that?"

"Practice," he said succintly and put his arm around her shoulders to draw her close to him. "When we have our first big fight, we don't want to be amateurs, you know."

"Some of these days," she said, "you're going to *really* make me mad," but the threat of her words was belied by the way she once again rested her head against his shoulder. "Now, admit the truth —you *wanted* to give Flopper a home and you *wanted* to give Susie and the kittens a home, didn't you?"

"O.K.—I admit it," he said. "It seems to be a human characteristic to want pets around. Illogical—but human nature."

"Logic, *fooey!*" She turned her head and made a face at him. "A computing machine is infallably logical, but do you think I'd ever want to marry one?"

He raised his brows. "I certainly hope not, that would be ridiculous. Also, you'd get bored with life-with-an-adding-machine."

"I'd sue it for divorce on grounds of mental cruelty. Imagine how life would be if you had to always be logical in everything you did

and never did anything because you *wanted* to, like going swimming and playing games and giving homes to lost dogs and cats and —and—" She broke off to stare past him, toward the mouth of the canyon. *"Look!"* She pointed, sudden excitement in her voice. "There alongside the trail—the spotted kitten. He wasn't here for breakfast—there he is now. Susie got her fourth one yesterday and now *he's* found one!"

He followed her gaze and saw the half-grown spotted kitten some three hundred away and perhaps fifty feet to one side of the trail. As he watched the kitten circled a few steps, carefully keeping its eyes on whatever it was circling as it did so. It was, he saw, holding something at bay in a small area free of brush but was not yet making an effort to kill it.

"It's another one," he said, turning back into the cabin. "I'll kill it on my way to work."

He went into the bedroom and came back with a .38 automatic pistol in his hand. "I used to be a pretty good shot with one of these," he remarked in explanation. "A shovel would do just as well, but I think I'll see if I've lost the ability to hit the broad side of a barn."

"Do a good job," she said. "As soon as I sweep and do a few other things, I'm going up to the creek to get some watercress for salad. I hope—" She frowned worriedly. "I hope this is the last one—I'm afraid of the things."

"Susie would have had this one by now if it hadn't been for her having to take time off to drink her breakfast milk and wash her face. The wind's in the wrong direction for her to smell it yet, but she'd have spotted it before it got much closer to the cabin." He stepped off the porch and started up the trail. "I'll be back about noon. Be careful when you go after that watercress and don't wear those idiotic cutaway moccasins."

"I won't," she answered, for once not disputing his opinion of her footwear.

He was still a hundred feet from the spotted kitten when he heard the low, dry buzz. It was a rattlesnake, as he had known it would be. It was coiled, its head weaving restlessly, and the kitten was watching it with cold intentness. The rattlesnake turned away from the kitten as he came up to them and tried to slither away to the cover of the nearest bush. The kitten darted around in front of it, just beyond striking range, and cut off its retreat.

The snake stopped, to coil and wait with its head poised to strike. The kitten stood before it as mo-

tionless as a little statue, only a faint tremor to the end of its tail to indicate any emotion. That, and its eyes. They were, as Hart observed on previous such occasions, quite wide and green and mercilessly cold. There was always something *different* about the look in a cat's eyes when it watched a snake; a concentration, a hair-trigger alertness, and an icy, implacable hatred. Yet, despite the kitten's alertness, there was an air of calmness in the way it watched the snake, almost contempt. It knew instinctively that the snake was deadly dangerous but that instinctive knowledge was outweighed by the other instinctive knowledge; the knowledge that the snake was afraid of *it* and would never dare to deliberately come within striking range. The rattlesnake would never dare approach the kitten; it had but one desire—to escape.

The two were motionless for a few seconds with the snake waiting to strike, its triangular head, two-thirds as wide as Hart's hand, poised and ready. Then the snake broke and tried to dart away from the kitten. The kitten flashed in front of it, still just out of striking range, and the snake stopped to coil and squirm in indecision, its red tongue flickering in and out and its buzzing rising higher and higher in pitch as its agitation increased.

Hart looked back toward the cabin and saw that Susie and the kittens were still on the porch. He raised his voice and called to her: "Susie—*snake!*"

He had taught her to recognize the word and she was off the porch at once, to come trotting up the trail with the five kittens stringing out behind her and Gwen standing in the doorway, shading her eyes against the sun with one hand as she watched.

He turned back to the snake. It wouldn't be long — not after Susie got there.

The snake's head was weaving restlessly as it tried to evade the stare of the kitten and find a way to escape. It tried again to dart away, and again the kitten flashed in front of it to cut off its retreat. The snake stopped, unable to reach the safety of the bush, unable in its fear to pass near the kitten. Its fear was visibly increasing and so was its hate; a vicious, reptilian hatred for the half-grown kitten that stood before it. But, greater than the hatred was the fear; the old, old instinctive fear of a cat that was common to all snakes.

It was strange, the way snakes feared cats. One strike with that broad head and there would be enough venom in the kitten's body

to kill a dozen like it, yet the snake did not dare to strike. Should the kitten come within striking range, it would strike—but it was afraid to approach the kitten with the purpose of striking it. There was something about the way the kitten stared at it, the cold lack of fear, that the snake could not understand and feared. And the longer the kitten stared at the snake, the greater the snake's fear would become.

There were animals that enjoyed an immunity from the bite of a rattlesnake; a hog, protected by its fat, could kill a rattlesnake; a band of sheep, protected by their wool, would blindly trample a rattlesnake to death. Some animals could kill rattlesnakes; a deer could, some small, fast dogs could. But the rattlesnake feared none of these, would try to strike any of them. Yet the kitten, completely vulnerable with neither wool nor fat to protect it, did not fear the snake and knew the snake feared it. It was something peculiar to cats and snakes; an inherent hatred and enmity that went back to the dawn of creation.

Susie trotted up and took in the scene with one swift glance. The kitten relaxed as he turned the job over to the more capable paws of his mother and she stood a moment just beyond striking range, studying the snake. It coiled closer, afraid to try to escape from her for such an action would render it vulnerable by forcing it to uncoil, knowing in its tiny reptilian mind that in the lean, wise old cat before it was Death.

Susie paused only briefly in her appraisal of it, then she stepped forward with her eyes fixed on the wide-jawed head and her body as tense as a coiled spring. She calmly, deliberately, came within striking range and waited for it to strike at her, one forepaw slightly lifted. The snake struck, then; the very thing Susie had intended for it to do. It's head flicked forward in a motion too fast for Hart to see and at the same time, and even faster, there was the flash of Susie's paw. That, and her backward leap.

It was a blur of movement too swift for human eyes to follow but in that split-second the snake had struck, its fangs had encountered only thin air where Susie had been and, simultaneously, it had felt the sharp rip of her claws down its venomous head. Then they were poised again, as before, but this time there were three slashes down the top of the snake's head from which blood was beginning to ooze.

She moved in on it again, her pupils two razor-edge slits in eyes that were like hard emeralds. She

came within range and the snake struck again. It was the same as before; the invisibly swift stab of the white fangs was too slow to equal the speed of the slashing claws. There were more bloody furrows down the snake's head when the blur of movement was over. The next time there would be still more, and it would go on until the snake's head was half torn from its body and it was dead. It could end no other way; it was not the nature of a cat to permit a snake to live.

There was insane fury, now, to the quick coiling of the snake, the high, shrill buzzing of its tail and the frantic flickering of its head. It was reaching the stage where its rage and fear was nothing short of madness and it would deliberately attack anything in the world—except a cat. Hart threw a cartridge into the chamber of the .38. He had no desire to see anything die a slow death, not even a rattlesnake. Although, it seemed to him, there was something downright splendid about the way Susie—and all other cats—could put the fear of Eternity into man's traditional enemy, the serpent.

As Susie began easing back within range of the snake Hart lined the sights on its head and pulled the trigger. The snake's head smashed to the ground at the impact of the bullet and the cats jumped back in startled surprise at the crack of the pistol.

Susie looked at the dead, writhing snake with a sudden and complete lack of interest, gave Hart a look that seemed to contain definite disgust and went over to sit in the shade of a bush.

"Sorry, Susie—I know you didn't really need any help," he apologized.

The kittens were crowding around the snake, attacking it in emulation of their mother's fight with it. They were only kittens, but they were learning. By the time they were grown he and Gwen would have a very efficient crew to rid the place of rattlesnakes. Susie, alone, had killed four in the past two months that he knew of for certain—and one of them had crawled into the cabin while Gwen was gone, to lay coiled under the butane range. Had it not been for the vigilance of Susie, it would still have been there when Gwen returned to prepare dinner, her bare, brown legs the target for its striking fangs. By that one act, alone, Susie had far more than repaid them for giving her and her kittens a home.

He picked the snake up on the end of a stick and tossed it far out in the brush. The kittens watched it arc through the air and

fall from sight; with the snake no longer there, they lost interest in the past events and wandered over to join their mother. He hefted the pistol in his hand, wondering whether to take it with him or take it back to the cabin. Deciding one was as much trouble as the other, he waved to Gwen who was still watching from the doorway and started up the trail.

He was some distance up it when he looked back to see the ubiquitous spotted kitten following him —or following in so far as necessary delays to inspect interesting scents and insects along the trail would permit. The red kitten was watching the spotted one, apparently half a mind to go, too. He went on—they wouldn't follow him very far up the canyon, anyway. Perhaps as far as the creek; perhaps they'd change their minds and return to the cabin.

At the edge of the sagebrush flat the trail went down into the canyon, following along the side of the steep wall in a gentle grade. He made his way along the narrow trail, which was sixty feet above the floor of the canyon at its highest point, and down to the bottom of the canyon. It was as he started up the canyon that he first detected the odor. It was very faint, so faint that he could not place it. His thoughts were upon the survey he would make that morning and he was hardly conscious of it, though a part of his mind noted it and was vaguely disturbed by it. He walked on, past the place along the creek where Gwen would gather the watercress, and there an almost imperceptible breeze drifted down from the up-canyon. It brought the odor stronger and he stopped, the vague uneasiness in his mind suddenly awakening to wary alertness.

It was the odor of a snake.

He looked about him, but there was nothing to be seen. He knew he could not have gotten any of the odor of the snake he had killed on his clothes, and the odor coming down the canyon was not quite that of a rattlesnake; it was fully as offensive and reptilian, but *different*.

He shook his head, puzzled, and walked on. Two hundred feet farther on the canyon swung in a bend and the trail took a shortcut through a thick growth of junipers. Here the odor became definitely stronger and a creepy feeling ran up his spine. He kept his eyes on the ground, watching where he was stepping as he went through the heavy underbrush. There was no doubt about the odor; while not quite like that of a rattlesnake, it was certainly the odor of *some*

kind of a snake. Or several snakes, judging by the strength of it.

He stepped out of the thicket of trees and brush to the sandy bed of the canyon and looked up. There, not over fifty feet in front of him, was Flopper—and the thing he had smelled.

The Slistian scout ship drifted down through the darkness, silently, undetected. Sesnar watched the little that the viewscreen could show in the darkness, his eighteen-foot snake-like body coiled in the concave pilot's chair before the control board, and patiently heard the thoughts that emanated from the spherical device beside him.

"Is there any evidence of intelligent life in the immediate vicinity?" the thought from the transmitter sphere asked.

"None," Sesnar's own thought replied. "I'm descending over an isolated section of the western part of the continent. The instruments indicate considerable mineralization in this area under me, including uranium. There are the lights of some kind of a small city in the far distance, but that is all."

The sphere made no comment and Sesnar asked, "Shall I sterilize the area in which I shall land?"

It required the usual two seconds for the sphere to project his thought through a hundred light-years of space to his superior on Slistia and another two seconds for the reply to come back. "No. Although your observations have shown no great technological knowledge on the part of the natives, they may possess means of detecting your use of the sterilizer ray. They do possess the atomic and hydrogen bombs, we know, and the discovery upon their planet of an alien spaceship equipped with such a weapon as the sterilizer ray would most certainly cause them to attempt to interfere with your preliminary surveys and your capture of some of the natives for examination and study. When you are near the surface you shall proceed toward the area the instruments show to contain radio-active ores, flying low and watching for evidences of habitation, such as the lights of individual dwellings."

Sesnar duly acknowledged the order.

It did not seem strange to him that he, alone, should have been dispatched to make the preliminary survey of the new world while the nine members of the psychologist-strategist board remained upon Slistia to direct his most detailed activities by means of the thought transmitter sphere. It was merely coldly logical. No Slistian could foretell the degrees of civi-

lization, if any, on a world a hundred lightyears away. Such a world *might* possess defensive weapons unknown to the Slistians. Such a thing had never happened —and no Slistian doubted ultimate Slistian victory—but the preliminary survey would disclose the weapons, if any, that the natives possessed; would disclose the resources of the new world, including the vital radioactive ores, and would provide specimens of the native intelligent life for study and ultimate vivisection. The weapons of the Slistians were many and deadly, with the hypnotic power of the Slistian mind the most insidiously deadly weapon of all. Yet there was always the small possibility of the natives possessing deadly weapons of their own and an exploration scout, such as Sesnar, proceeded under the constant supervision of the highly learned, very systematic, psychologists-strategists of the Colonization Board. The scout ship was equipped with every needed device and instrument to survey the new world, from mapping its continents to analyzing its air and determining what harmful viruses might be present. It carried robotic equipment to mine and refine radioactive ores for powering the force field it would throw around the mineralized area; the area that would become the Slistian headquarters for their Extermination Force ships. It carried a well equipped laboratory where the captured native specimens could be probed and questioned by Sesnar's mind until their own minds were drained dry of information. After that, they would be placed on the tables and the viewscreen overhead would permit the Colonization Board on Slistia, as well as the Extermination Force Board, to learn the physical structure of the natives as Sesnar methodically vivisected them.

It was all very logical and carefully planned. A scout ship required a considerable amount of uranium-based fuel and the supply still remaining upon Slistia and the two worlds Slistia had captured was limited. Although thought waves could be transmitted across a hundred lightyears of space in two seconds, the material body of the ship required eight months to traverse the same distance. One Slistian could, with the specially-equipped ship, do as quick and thorough a job of surveying a new planet as a crew of Slistians could do and additional Slistians, plus additional food for the eight months voyage, would have required an additional amount of fuel; fuel that would be needed by the Extermination Force ships that

would follow later. It was only nessary to know that the new world possessed the radioactive ores and to learn of what means of defense the natives might have.

The latter was very important; upon the study of the specimens of native life and their weapons would depend the strategy of the Extermination Force. They were quite efficient in ridding a world of its natives and their efficiency was due to careful planning beforehand; to equipping the Extermination Force ships with the most suitably destructive weapons for the job.

Sesnar halted the descent of the ship a few hundred feet above the surface and let it travel slowly in the direction of the uranium mineralization. He was almost to the bulk of a mountain when he saw the yellow light. He notified his superiors at once.

"There is a yellow-white rectangle of lght some distance away. It's apparently artificial light from the window of a native's dwelling."

"Pass it by." The command was from Eska, head of the Colonization Board. "Take no chance of detection at this time. Pass it by and conceal your ship near the area of greatest mineralization."

Sesnar continued on his way, rising as he did so to clear the foothills of the mountain. He had gone a relatively short distance, the rectangle of light in the native's dwelling still visible behind him, when the instruments told him he was directly over the deposit of uranium. He descended to the ground, letting the robotic control scan the terrain under the ship with its radar eyes and select a safe and level spot. The ship settled to earth and he notified Eska of the fact.

There was a certain emotionless satisfaction in Eska's thought as he said, "The nearness of the native's dwelling to the uranium deposit simplifies things. Tomorrow you can accomplish both the capture of natives for study and the erection of the force field. In the meantime, you shall remain in the ship."

The latter order was not without sound reasons of caution; some creatures could see excellently in the dark and no Slistian could use its hypnotic powers on an animal it could not see.

Sesnar waited until dawn, then he reached out with the two small arms that were the only interruption of the snake-like form of his body and picked up his mentablaster, to snap it down on the four metal studs set in the tough scales of the top of his head. He took no other weapon with him as he crawled forth from the ship; he needed no other weapon and only

the most unexpected circumstances could cause him to need *it*, the hypnotic power of its mind serving very well to force other creatures to do as he willed.

The ship had landed in the bottom of a small canyon. There had been something in the canyon very recently, he saw, something that had dug some narrow trenches across what he presumed to be the deposit of uranium ore. He reported the fact to Eska.

"The work of the natives, obviously," Eska commented. "It would not be advisable to lift the ship at present. Reconnoiter—there should be some kind of a path the natives have made and it will lead to the dwelling. Follow the path for a short distance and report what you find."

The thoughts of Eska, broadcast by the sphere inside the ship, came clearly to Sesnar and he obeyed the orders, pausing only long enough to try the menta-blaster on a small bush beside the path. It vanished in a puff of dust.

The menta-blaster was a Slistian achievement and one that could be used only by Slistians. It was operated by certain thought patterns, the type and intensity of the beam regulated at will. Since the thought pattern that operated it had to be very precise, it was useless to any warm-blooded animal; only a Slistian could produce the necessary pattern with the necessary machine-like precision. It was a characteristic of warm-blooded animals to be emotional to a certain extent and no emotional animal, no matter how intelligent, could be sure of suppressing its emotions sufficiently to always duplicate the rigid, precise thought pattern. Although it might seem to the warm-blooded, intelligent animal that its emotions were completely in check and its mind free of all influence from them, the emotional influence over the pure, cold logic would still be there to some slight extent, enough to prevent exact duplication of the thought pattern built into the menta-blaster.

The menta-blaster was, to the Slistians, quite unnecessary proof that cold-blooded and logical life forms were superior to warm-blooded and emotional life forms.

The path was easily found and he followed it. He had gone only a short distance when the canyon emptied into a much larger one; a canyon that led in the general direction of the native's dwelling. The path followed the creek bank down the larger canyon and there, feeding on the green vegetation beside the path, he saw the first specimen of the planet's life.

It was a small quadruped with long ears and its sensitive ears detected the whisper in the sand of Sesnar's coming at almost the same moment he saw it. It sat up high on its hind legs to stare at him, its nose twitching, then it wheeled to bound away. He brought it under hypnotic control and it fell limply to the ground.

It was, of course, still alive and conscious; merely held helpless. Sesnar crawled to it and searched its mind. It's mind held no information of any value, its intelligence was of a very low order. Obviously, it was not a member of the planet's intelligent form of life.

He touched the rabbit with his small, lizard-like hands, feeling the fast flutter of its heart, then ripped a sharp claw down its belly. The entrails spilled out on the ground and he observed with interest that the animal was strictly herbiverous. He reported the fact to Eska who then ordered him to release the rabbit from hypnotic control so that its reaction to pain might be observed.

At the release of hypnotic control it leaped high in the air with a thin, shrill scream, then fell back to lay flopping and kicking in the sand, its bloody entrails trailing behind it. It's efforts to escape quickly weakened and soon it could do no more than lie and watch Sesnar with intense fear in its eyes.

"A high degree of sensitivity to pain, with no desire to destroy the inflictor of the pain," Eska remarked. "No revenge instincts whatever. Should this characteristic of complete non-aggressiveness apply to the intelligent creatures, our colonization program should need relatively little aid from the Extermination Force."

Sesnar waited until the rabbit died, reporting its resistance to death. It took a remarkably long time for it to die—that is, for a warm-blooded animal. The characteristic sensitivity to pain of warm-blooded animals was usually one of the factors that hastened their death when badly injured. When it finally stopped panting he crawled on, both he and Eska feeling well satisfied on the whole, though the high resistance to death was not to be desired.

He had not crawled very far down the canyon when he encountered the next quadruped, coming upon it suddenly where the trail swung around a sharp bend in the canyon. It was trotting up the trail toward him, unable to scent him with the breeze momentarily blowing up the canyon and be brought it under control the moment he saw it. He left it standing on its four legs and went down

to it. It was considerably larger than the quadruped he had killed, shorter of ear and a different species altogether. He probed into its mind and found its intelligence to be of the third order; very high for a non-reasoning animal.

"Does its mind contain any information concerning the dominant form of life?" Eska asked.

"The dominant form is biped and this animal lives with two of them," Sesnar replied. "It exhibits an odd regard for them; an illogical emotional regard."

He went on to explain the affection of the dog for its masters and their affection for it as best he could. It was not a new thing to either Sesnar or Eska — they had observed similar attachments among other warm-blooded species —but it was impossible for them to comprehend the desire of two creatures of different species to be near each other and find pleasure in each others company.

Eska dismissed it as of no importance. "Apparently the same as the attachment between the natives of Venda and the small animals they used to keep around them before our arrival. It might be termed a symbiosis of the emotions—utterly illogical and no more than another example of their mental inferiority. What other information does the quadruped's mind contain?"

"It isn't a mature specimen but it's thoughts are quite clear. It lives with two of these bipeds—a male and a female—in the dwelling near here. The male biped is to pass this way very soon and the quadruped has a strong desire for the biped to make its appearance. It's afraid of me but it seems confident the biped will either kill me or frighten me away."

"It has no doubt of the biped's ability to destroy you?" Eska asked.

"None whatever. Although it possesses no technical knowledge, of course, and is unable to supply me with any information concerning the biped's weapons."

"I think you will find the animal's confidence in the invincibility of the biped is due to the regard of the weaker for the stronger," Eska said. "Since the actions and abilities of the biped are beyond the quadruped's intelligence to comprehend it assumes, having no experience to the contrary, that nothing can be superior to the biped it depends upon for protection.

"Now, if you have extracted all the information of value in the animal's mind, kill it and conceal yourself near the path the biped is to use. A search of the biped's mind will reveal if there are any other bipeds in the vicinty, other

than the biped's mate. If not, you will capture her, too, and return with both of them to your ship. You will then throw a force field around that area and lift ship to complete your mapping of the opposite hemisphere. The minds and bodies of the biped and its mate can be studied enroute."

"The path goes through a dense thicket of small trees a very short distance ahead of me," Sesnar said. "They would afford perfect concealment—"

He stopped as he caught the crunching of footsteps from within the trees. He reported to Eska, then watched the spot where the trail emerged from the trees. In a few moments the maker of the sounds appeared.

"It is the biped."

"If it shows no hostility toward you, do not bring it under full and immediate control," Eska ordered. "Let it remain in a hypnotic semi-trance until you have questioned it. It will eventually realize you are searching its mind, of course, and when that happens you will bring it under full control and proceed in the usual manner. But, until it is aware of your purpose, you can extract information from it with little difficulty."

Hart thought at first sight that the thing must be a boa constrictor that had escaped from a circus. Then he saw the hands. The two arms sprouted from tiny shoulders like two thick bullsnakes and terminated in pale green lizard-like hands, the size of a woman's hands. The forward portion of the body was erect with the belly a glazed yellow. The head was broad and slightly domed, swaying in the air nearly six feet above the ground. There was something mounted on the snakes head; a flat object with a short tube projecting a little in front of it. He noticed it only vaguely, his attention caught by the snake's eyes.

They seemed to possess an intelligence, even at a distance, and they fascinated him. He walked forward to see them better, remembering the pistol in his pocket as something of casual importance. The eyes were quite large, dead black in color with thin orange rims. There was an intelligence behind them, an intelligence as great as his own, and he could feel it studying him. Some instinct within him was trying to warn him —*danger*—but it was not until he had stopped before the snake and breathed the heavy, nauseating odor of it that the spell broke.

Snake! Men did not walk up to snakes as a hypnotized sparrow might do—*but he had just done so.*

He saw the intelligence in the

snake's eyes for what it was, then; a cold, alien appraisal of him with the same objective detachment with which an entomologist might inspect an insect. It had not moved and there was no threat in its manner, other than the alienness of it and the way it had drawn him so irresistibly to it, but that was warning enough. He let his hand slide to his hip pocket and grasp the hard butt of the pistol, not drawing it but wanting it ready should he need it. Until, and if, the snake made a threatening move, he would try to question it. It very obviously was not of Earth and to kill it first then ask questions later would be both uninformative and stupid. It *might* intend him no harm; he would wait and see and keep his hand on the pistol.

It would most likely be from another planet of the solar system. He could draw a diagram of the solar system in the sand and—*there were no humans near but for Gwen at the cabin* — in the sand and find out which planet it came from. Venus should be the one, the second from the sun—*she should be along in a few minutes*—

He stopped, suddenly aware of the random thoughts. His mind spoke another one: *She would be after watercress and would not be armed as he was*—

He cut the thought off with the chilling realization that the snake was questioning him. It could be nothing else. As the source of a motor nerve, when touched in an exposed brain, will make the corresponding muscle twitch, so the snake was questioning him; touching with its mind at the proper memory cells, exciting the desired memory responses.

The snake-thing wanted both him and Gwen. *Why?*

The implications of the queston broke the hypnosis and the warning instinct screamed frantically: Kill it—*while you can!*

His arm jerked to whip the pistol from his pocket—and froze. His entire body was abruptly as motionless and powerless as though locked in a vice. He could not move—he had heeded the warning too late.

"The biped has an intelligence of the first order," Sesnar reported. "It became aware of my control before I had completed the questioning and attempted to kill me the moment it realized my intentions. I put it under full control before it could harm me, of course."

"Determine its full resistance to questioning while under muscular control," Eska ordered.

His entire body from the neck down was separated from the control of his brain. He was standing before the snake and could see it watching him, him smell the odor of it; he was normal and the sensory nerves were functioning as always. He could feel the weight of the pistol in his pocket and his fingers could feel the butt of it as they held it half drawn from the pocket. The sensory nerves were functioning normally but his commands to his muscles were being cut off. His mind could formulate the commands and try to send them with all its power but nothing happened. Somewhere in his brain where the pure thought was transformed into a neural impulse, the snake had siezed control. At that relay station his own commands were being cut off and the snake's commands substituted.

He had made a grave mistake; he had underestimated his opponent. He had reached for the pistol with his mind wide open, with his intention plain there for the snake to read. He should have kept the thought subdued, should have covered it over with other, stronger, thoughts. He had learned a lesson—perhaps it would not be too late. Physically he was helpless but his mind was still his own. His only resistance to the snake would have to be mental for the time being. In the end, if he made no more mistakes, he might win the game of wits and kill it before it killed him and Gwen.

A question came from the snake's mind, not the touching at the memory cells as before but a direct question.

"What is the percentage of uranium in the ore samples at your dwelling?"

It was, he realized, a test of his ability to withstand questioning. The snake would not care what the percentage might be—it was a test, the first one.

"Why do you want to know?" he asked.

The snake's answer was to touch quickly at the memory cells where the information lay and to repeat over and over: *The percentage—the percentage—*

Three point one four one five nine, he thought rapidly, and multiply by the diameter and you have the circumference. The circumference is—*the percentage—the percentage—* The thought was insistent, demanding an answer.—The circumference is pi times the diameter and how do you like those onions?

The reply from the snake was a greater insistence upon an answer. *The percentage—the percentage—the percentage—* It hammered at his mind and the answer

was there, eager to respond to the snake's touch and make itself heard. It was there, just below the level of expression, and he fought to keep it there, submerged, while he covered it over with other thoughts.

According to the semanticists, a thought cannot be conceived clearly without its conversion to words. Not necessarily spoken, but the thought conceived with the aid of the semantic expressions to outline it, to detail and clarify it. Forty-one percent, expressed in words, is a very definite part of the whole. Forty-one percent as a thought unaccompanied by the proper semantic equivalent is an indefinite minor proportion. He could not block the snake from probing at his memory cells but he could let the answer the probing evoked remain a wordless thought, an impression in his mind that was not clear even to himself, by keeping the answer below the level of semantic expression and covering it up with other thoughts of his own making and spoken aloud.

The percentage—the percentage — It was coming harder, with the full force of the snake's mind behind it, and he met it with every evasion he could contrive. He recited mathematical formulae to it, he told it an Aesop fable, he gave it portions of the federal mining laws. The question flicked relentlessly at his mind — *the percentage—the percentage*—and his words that kept the answer submerged came more swiftly and louder as the moments went by, his concentration became more intense.

He was telling it of the crystallographic structure of tourmaline when it was abruply out of his mind, to stand silently before him as though meditating.

"Well," he asked, his voice dropping to normal pitch, "did you find out anything?"

It gave no indication that it heard him.

"Its resistance to questioning is unexpectedly high," Sesnar reported. "As with all warm-blooded animals, its means of communication is vocal and I left its vocal organs uncontrolled that it might accompany its answer with the semantic expressions that would give the answer the greatest clarity. It exhibited considerable cunning by taking advantage of the freedom of its vocal organs to use them to speak other thoughts and keep the answer I desired submerged."

"Pain will break its resistance," Eska replied. "The combination of pain plus control will quickly destroy its ability to keep the answer submerged. Use your menta-

blaster with care, however—the biped must not be so severely injured that it will be unfit for complete questioning and physical study when you take it and its mate to the ship. Use the Type 4 beam."

He had won! The power of the snake's mind, great as it was, had not been great enough to force him to answer. It was only the first victory—he was still held as powerless as before—but it had been a victory There would be other tests but he knew, now, that the snake-thing was incapable of hypnotizing a human. It could only assume control of the body, not of the mind.

Flopper was standing fifteen feet to one side of him, held by the same control. Or even more so—Flopper could not turn his head. He could move his eyes but that was all. Flopper was watching him now, fear in his eyes and a look of hopeful expectancy; a faith that his master would destroy the thing before them. It was pathetically humorous; he was the pup's god and a pup knows that its god can do *anything*.

Then the snake was speaking to his mind again, very concisely, very menacingly.

"You will tell me the percentage of uranium in the ore samples. You will tell me at once and with no attempts to submerge the answer."

Well, here we go again, he thought. He had an unpleasant premonition that this time it would not be so easy—but he would soon find out.

"Go to hell," he said.

The tube on the snake's head glowed a deep violet and something like the blades of incandescent knives stabbed into his chest and began to cut slowly across it. It was a searing, burning pain that ripped down his stomach and up his neck, to explode like a white light in his brain. The question was coming again—*the percentage—the percentage*—lashing at his mind like a whip through the glare of pain. *The percentage—the percentage*— The pain intensified and tore at every nerve in his body while the question goaded incessantly: *The percentage—the percentage*— He fought against and the white glare engulfed his brain until the question was no longer a question but a knife thrusting again and again into his mind while he was an entity composed of pain and spinning in a hell-fire of agony, writhing blind and mindless in the white glare while the question stabbed at him. —*the percentage—the percentage*—

It was meaningless, as meaning-

less as his own thought in return: *thirty-five percent—thirty-five percent*— Meaningless. He had been going to fight something—he couldn't remember what it was. His mind was blinded by the pain and he couldn't remember—nothing existed but pain, unbearable pain . . .

The chaos faded slowly and the white glare melted away. The knife was no longer in his brain and the tube on the snake's head was crystal white again. He knew, then, that he had lost.

His heart was pounding violently and his chest was an intolerable aching and burning. He looked down at it. Something like a row of sharp knives had cut halfway across it. The cuts were not bleeding—the knives had cauterized as they cut . . .

"The biped's resistance was greater than expected," Sesnar said. "I was forced to cut and burn it rather severely, but it will still be able to serve our purpose."

"Proceed to the place where the biped's mate is to come," Eska ordered. "If she is there, return with both of them to your ship. If not, continue on to the dwelling and get her. Nothing is to be gained by waiting and there is always the slight possibility that other bipeds might make an unexpected appearance. The sooner you can return to the ship with the two natives and erect the force field, the better."

There was a command from the snake to turn and step forward. He started to turn, then, even as the movement was begun, there came another command from the snake: *Stop*.

He stopped and stood motionless. The snake was looking beyond him, at something in the junipers behind him. Its full attention, but for its control over him, seemed to be on whatever it saw. The seconds went silently by as the snake stared and as they passed he felt an almost imperceptible lessening of the control; a faint tremor to his arm and hand as he tried to force them to obey his will. *Something* in the junipers was loosening the snake's control over him.

A brief glow of dim red came from the tube on the snake's head, existing barely long enough to be seen and then vanishing. With its vanishing the control weakened to the point where he could move his arm. It was like fighting against the drag of quicksand, but he could move it. He dropped his eyes to the target, the glistening yellow belly where he could bring the pistol up with the minimum amount of movement.

The pistol was almost free of his

pocket when the snake abruptly returned its attention to him; seizing control with a savagery that ripped at his muscles like an electric shock. His fingers flew open and the pistol dropped back into his pocket. His hand was jerked around and slammed against his side. The snake permitted his knotted muscles to relax, then, but the tightening of his chest muscles had torn at the wounds and for what seemed a long time a sickness and a blackness swirled around him, the bulging eyes of the snake seeming to advance and retreat through it.

The blackness dispersed, though the sickness remained, and the dizziness left him. The snake was not moving and he could, for the first time, sense vague thoughts impinging upon its mind. Apparently the thing in the junipers had so disturbed the snake that it was unconsciously letting some of its own thoughts come through with the control. There was a distinct impression that it was communicating with another of its kind but there was no clue as to the identity of the thing in the junipers.

"A small animal suddenly appeared in the trees behind the biped," Sesnar said. "That is, I *think* it was an animal."

"You *think* it was an animal?" Eska's thought was a cold hiss. "What is the meaning of this? You were not sent on this mission to indulge in guessing—*determine* if it's an animal."

"I tried to—and I couldn't!"

"Explain yourself. I sense an agitation in your mind. Explain!"

"This animal is different to any we've ever encountered—if it *is* an animal," Sesnar said, his agitation becoming more evident as he spoke. "I cannot determine what it is because I not only cannot control it —*I cannot enter its mind!*"

Eska was silent for a while. "This is incredible," he said at last. "It cannot be! The mathematics of Kal, as well as our own centuries of colonization of alien worlds, have irrefutably proven that no warm-blooded creature can resist the power of the Slistian mind!"

"This one did."

"Perhaps," suggested Eska, "it is such a low form of life that it has no mind to enter, existing solely by instinct as the mollusks do."

"It is physically far too high on the evolutionary scale to not possess an intelligence," Sesnar said. "It has the appearance of an animal but that is all I can learn about it. I cannot control it, I cannot enter its mind, and—" Sesnar paused, as though dreading to reveal the rest. "*It* disturbs *my* mind!"

"Impossible!" Eska stated flatly. "No creature can disturb the

mind of a Slistian."

"This one did," Sesnar repeated. "It disturbs me so that I cannot project the thought pattern into my menta-blaster. I tried to kill it, but despite my efforts to produce a full-force blast I was able to activate the menta-blaster for but a moment and then at such low intensity that the creature never felt it."

"Your menta-blaster must have developed a defect," Eska said. "I refuse to believe that any creature could so affect a Slistian. Is the creature still in view?"

"No. It vanished when I tried to activate the menta-blaster and is now watching me from the concealment of the trees."

"How do you know it is?"

"I can sense it watching me."

"Your menta-blaster has no doubt become defective," Eska said again. "Test it. Lower your head behind the protection of the biped and test it."

Sesnar dropped his head lower and his eyes searched for a suitable target. They fell on the quadruped, still motionless under his control. It would serve the purpose admirably and it was of no other use to him. With the biped's body between himself and the thing in the trees the disturbance was gone from his mind. He felt the familiar thought patterns come easily: *Type 1, quarter force—fire!*

Confused thoughts swirled in Hart's mind. Why had the snake not killed whatever it saw behind him? It had started to do so—there had been the first dim glow from the tube on its head——and then it had stopped? Why? The snake had been disturbed by what it saw—why hadn't it eliminated it?

He turned his head as far as he could but the trees were directly behind him and he could not see them. Neither could he tell what it might have been by Flopper's reaction; the pup's back was to the trees, too.

The faith was still in Flopper's eyes. He was afraid of the thing before them and could not understand the awful paralysis that held him, but he knew with all his dog's heart that his master would help him. Then the snake dropped its head to the level of Hart's chest and looked directly at the pup. Frantic, imploring appeal flashed into Flopper's eyes as he sensed what was coming.

There was a blue-white flash from the tube on the snake's head and a crackling sound. A puff of dust hid Flopper from view for a moment. When it cleared he was lying on the ground, broken and still, a tiny trickle of blood staining his mouth.

"The blaster functions perfectly, the thought patterns are produced without effort, when I am not under the direct gaze of the thing in the trees," Sesnar reported.

"Proceed with the biped toward its dwelling," Eska ordered. "Permit it to retain its weapon—should the other thing appear again, force the biped to kill it."

It had killed Flopper!

Hart felt sick with the futility of his hatred for the stinking, scaly thing before him; he wanted, more than he had ever wanted anything in his life, to reach the pistol and empty it into the glazed belly, to watch the snake fall and then tramp its head into a shapeless mass. He wanted—but the command came to turn and he was doing so.

He turned and began the walking back down the trail, the snake slithering along beside him. They passed the limp little bundle of black and white fur that had been Flopper and went on, bypassing the shortcut through the junipers and following the sandy canyon bed. *Was the thing still afraid of what it had seen in the trees.* His chest was a sheet of fire and his heart was slugging heavily. Then the trees were behind them and they were back on the trail again, passing by the place where Gwen had intended to get the watercress. *Were they going to the cabin?* They came to the place where the trail climbed out of the canyon and his heart pounded harder as they started up it. There was a limit to the injury and pain a man could stand, no matter how hard he might fight to ignore it, and he had withstood injury and pain to such an extent that his body could take little more of it.

They were climbing up the grade and the snake could have but one reason for going to the cabin. It wanted Gwen; it wanted a pair of specimens of the native life to study; specimens that it would crush and examine as emotionlessly as he would crush and examine a specimen of ore. It hadn't told him, but he knew. It would force him to stand there where the trail came out on top of the bank and motion to Gwen to come to him. She might even now be starting out to gather the watercress; she would be able to see him easily from the cabin and she would come without question when he motioned her to do so. She had no reason to suspicion any danger.

He would have to do something —*what?* His breath was coming harsh and labored and a blur kept trying to form before his eyes. It was hard to think, yet he had to think. He had to do something, and quickly. He was weakening

and his time for action was running short—

Stop.

He stopped, the snake beside him, and wondered why they had done so. It was looking up the trail, up at the top of the climb, and he shook his head to clear the blur away from his eyes. There was something grey there—

Kill it!

He saw what it was as his hand obediently reached for the pistol. It was one of the grey kittens. *Why didn't the snake kill it?* He thought of the rattlesnake he had killed so long ago and he knew what it was the snake-thing had seen in the trees, knew why its cold, merciless mind had been so disturbed.

Kill it!

Kill it—he must kill the kitten *because the snake was afraid of it!* The snake *couldn't* kill it! There was a flooding of hope through him. He had a plan, now; held deep and vague in his mind as he brought the sights of the pistol in line with the kitten's face. There was no time to inspect the plan, not even the hazy sub-conversion inspection it would have to be. He had been ordered to kill the kitten and his muscles were no longer his own: he could not disobey. His mind was his own, however, and he could—

The front sight was on the kitten's head, outlined in the rear sight, and he made his thought sharp and clear: *This pistol shoots low; I must draw a coarse bead.* Another thought tried to make itself heard: *No—no—it shoots high.* He drowned it out with the one of his own creating: *Shoots low—draw a coarse bead.* The front sight came up in obedience to the thought he was making sharp and clear, the snake unable to read the thought he was keeping submerged. The sight loomed high in the notch of the rear sight and he pressed the trigger. The startled kitten vanished in the brush beside the trail as the bullet snapped an inch over its head.

I did it! There was exultation in the thought—it was difficult to keep it hidden. There was a plan that would work—it would *have* to work—

"What is your plan?"

The snake's question came hard and cold and the tentacles flicked at his mind—*the plan—the plan—.*

His hope became despair. He had let part of his thoughts get through to the surface, and now the snake knew of them.— *the plan — the plan* — The tube was coming in line with his chest again. He would, in the end, tell the snake what it wanted to know—his mind would be sent spinning into the

glare of pain and it would no longer be his own. But if he could delay it for a while . . .

"I'll tell you," he said calmly. The snake waited, the tube still in line with his chest. "Cats — they chase mice," he went on, his mind two things; a frenzied effort to think and to talk calmly to the snake with one part of it and a desperate planning in the darkness of sub-conversion with the other part. "Cats chase mice and I was going to yell at them—*Susie—SNAKE!*"

At his shout he expected, with the part of his mind he was keeping hidden from the snake, that the tube would flash violet again as the snake detected the subterfuge. But it had not—not for the moment, at least. Susie would come she had to—

"They always chase these mice and the reason I sent for them—" *The snake wouldn't let him talk nonsense for long — Susie would have to come soon—* "I sent for them because the mice scared the farmer's wife when the clock—" *What if she had gone back to the cabin? What if there was nothing to hear him but the grey kitten?* —"struck one. I—"

"You are hiding something."

The tube flashed violet and his mind went reeling into the white glare where the tentacles lashed like whips—*the plan—the plan—* Something was saying: *You are a snake and snakes are afraid of cats. I called Susie so you couldn't use the tube—so I could kill you before you could kill Gwen and me . . .*

His mind came out of the glare again, out of the blinding intensity of pain. Vision returned and he saw the snake before him, with the tube once again crystal white. It knew, now, of his plan—he had resisted the questioning as long as he could and all he could do now was hope that Susie had heard him, that she was coming and had not returned to the cabin, after all. The cabin was too far away for her to have heard his call from there . . .

The snake was watching the top of the trail, its little hands fidgeting. He followed the snake's gaze, to find the trail empty. *Susie—Susie*—he thought,—*don't fail us now. It's Gwen and I and maybe every human on Earth if this thing isn't killed. Hurry, Susie, and help me—help me so I can kill it—*

Then something appeared at the top of the trail, something grey. *Susie!* She had heard him! She came down the trail without pausing, flowing along low to the ground with her eyes fixed on the snake. She stopped eight feet short of them, her eyes stone-hard and unwavering in their stare.

Kill it.

There was a hint of emotion to

the command this time; a touch of urgency where, before, the commands of the snake had been as dispassionate as its own hard-scaled face.

Again his hand brought up the pistol, but this time his will was delaying it a little. Not much, but a little. Susie was not a kitten; she was a mature cat with a mature cat's contempt for snakes. A cat, even a kitten, instinctively knows the difference between a harmless snake, such as a garter snake, and a poisonous snake. such as a rattlesnake. A small kitten will kill a garter snake but it will not tackle a rattlesnake until it has acquired the necessary strength, speed and experience. For all its size, the snake-thing before Susie was still a snake; a snake without fangs. It could not harm her except by physical force and to do so it would have to move faster than she did. All her experience had taught her that no snake could ever equal her own lightning coordination. The effect of her stare upon the snake would be far stronger than that of a kitten; that it was stronger was made evident by the manner in which his hand was bringing up the pistol so slowly. She could not harm the snake, but such would not be necessary. She had only to sit there and torment its mind with her cold stare—in the end the snake-thing's mind and will would break, its fear would become so complete that it would lose all control over him. And then—he would kill the thing —

Kill it!

The command was more urgent and he was raising the pistol faster despite his efforts to hold it back. It would take time for her stare to fully affect the thing and it was not going to permit that. The sights were coming in line with Susie's face—all his will could not halt the movement and he was going to kill her. When he shot her, he would destroy the only hope for survival — when he pulled the trigger he would be killing himself and Gwen as surely as though the muzzle was against their own heads. He tried the subterfuge of thinking the gun shot low, but it failed. His hand brought the front sight down low in the notch of the rear sight and his finger tightened on the trigger. He concentrated on the movement of the finger, forgetting everything else in the effort to delay the squeeze of the trigger. The command came again: *Kill* — It broke and he felt the control lessen.

It came once more, but differently: *Kill them!*

Them? The pistol had dropped and was no longer in line with Susie. He looked up the trail and

saw why; the two grey kittens were trotting down the trail. They stopped beside their mother, one on each side of her, and their eyes as coldly intent upon the snake as hers.

No further command came for the time and the snake's hands fluttered with greater nervousness. The pistol was still in his hand but the muzzle had dropped toward the ground. There were six green eyes watching the snake now, and it was getting worried.

It would try again—it would have to try again, and soon. It took a little time for the stare of a cat to break a snake and the snake knew it. It was a snake and there was something about the impenetrable mind of a cat that it feared—but it was intelligent and it knew it could still escape if it acted quickly enough . . .

Gravel rattled down the face of the cliff his back was against. He twisted his neck to look up and saw the yellow kitten making its way along the ledge over his head. The kitten stopped just over him and there were eight cold eyes watching the snake. Three kittens to go, he thought, and then someone is going to get hurt. There was another yellow one and the red one, and the far-ranging spotted one should have been the one the snake saw in the trees—it should be coming up the trail any moment.

More gravel fell from the ledge above him; the other yellow one. The snake was darting its glance from the kittens on the ledge to Susie and the two beside her and did not see the spotted one trot up the trail and stop near the end of its long, thin tail. The red one was at the spotted one's heels and stopped beside it.

There was a trembling to his legs as the control lessened. The snake was breaking—he could not raise the gun to shoot the snake; it could not force him to shoot the cats. He felt an elation through the sickness and pain. The snake would break soon, would break and turn to flee. When it did the control would vanish and he would kill it. He would empty the pistol into the mottled green coils of it . . .

"Drop the weapon!"

His hand tried to spread open to drop the pistol and he tried to force it to clench the pistol tighter. If he dropped the pistol, the snake would scoop it up and use it to kill the cats—but his fingers were obeying the command, they were spreading apart.

He spoke quickly: "Did you know there are two more at your tail?"

It had the affect he had hoped for; the snake flicked its glance toward the two kittens, then there

was a flurry of movement as it whipped its tail away from them and closer about its body.

His grip was firmer on the pistol and for the first time he smiled at the snake. "Disconcerting, aren't they?" he asked.

"There are seven of the creatures," Sesnar reported. "I am not sure whether or not they can harm me physically—they display a complete lack of fear as though they might possess some power to destroy me of which I am unaware. The biped has now become a menace; I am losing control of it and when my control weakens sufficiently it intends to kill me. It is too strong for me to wrest the weapon from its hand but it is rapidly weakening from the effects of its injuries. As soon as it weakens sufficiently, I shall take the weapon away from it. Since the biped's primitive weapon operates by manual control, I can use it to kill the other creatures. I am now going to release the biped of all control but for the hand that holds the weapon. This will cause it to feel the full extent of its injuries and reduce it to helplessness very quickly. My control, itself, is steadily deteriorating but the biped is so severely injured that I have no doubt it will be helpless long before my control over it is completely gone."

He was standing with his back to the cliff, his feet spread a little, when the control over everything but his hand suddenly vanished. His knees turned to rubber and he fell back against the cliff. He had not realized, while his muscles were under the absolute control of the snake, just how weak he was. His back bumped against the cliff and he braced his feet, shoving as hard as his weakness would permit against the cliff to keep himself standing. It was not enough and he began to drop, his backbone scraping along the rough rock face. For a moment a fold in his shirt caught on a projection and supported him, then it slipped off and he dropped to the ground in a squatting position. It seemed he dropped with a terrible jar and the hell-fire rippled across his chest. The sickness flooded over him and the blur clouded his eyes. He put all his will into one thought: *Hold tight to the pistol!*

The blur faded away and he could see the snake, its head now above him. He was sitting with his legs doubled under him and his heart was a small *flub-flub* within him. He was sweating the cold sweat of shock and the hand that held the pistol was no longer tan but an odd greyish color. He watch-

ed it and waited, hoping the spell would pass before the snake realized how weak he was.

The worst of it did pass and a little color came back to his hand. His heart, relieved of the burden of supplying his legs with blood, began to beat a little stronger and the blackness that had hovered around him withdrew.

The snake was in a close coil a few feet before him, the coils sliding and slithering together and the snake-like arms a succession of nervous ripplings.

"Afraid, aren't you?" he asked. "You need a dog—cats run from dogs." He kept his mind free of information-giving surface thoughts and went on to bait it. "You could easily control a dog and force it to chase all these cats away.

The snake asked the question he had expected. "What is a dog?"

"The animal you killed was a dog."

He regretted that the snake's expressionless face prevented his seeing the effect of the disclosure but the thought would be galling bitterly in the snake's mind. It had no emotions—but one. There was one emotion it had to have; the fear of death. Without that a species would never survive. It was afraid, now, and the greater its fear became, the weakner its control over him would become. He would have no time to spare; the blackness had merely withdrawn a little way and it kept threatening to swoop back over him. He would have to fight it off as best he could and at the some time do what he could to increase the snake's fear.

"Cats," he said to it. "You're afraid of them and they're not afraid of you. Do you know why they're not afraid of you?"

"Why? The question was like a quick hiss, intense in its desire to know.

"Ask them," he answered. "They know; they can tell you. Ask them —look at them, go into their minds and learn why they don't fear you. Go ahead—go into their minds—"

A wisp of the darkness reached out to cloud his eyes and he waited for it to pass, holding tight to the pistol. The darkness withdrew and he repeated: "Go ahead—go into their minds. Burn them like you did me—make them tell you—go ahead—try it." He smiled up at the snake, twisted and mirthless. "They know what's going on in *your* mind; they know how they're breaking you without ever touching you. Why don't you go into their minds and learn why they hate you and hold you in contempt? Look into their eyes—go deep into their minds and see what you find . . ."

The cloud came again and he let his voice trail off to concentrate

on holding to the pistol.

"The biped has not weakened yet?" Eska asked.

"It is weakening very rapidly, though not yet helpless," Sesnar replied.

"We dare take no risks—this absurd situation must be remedied at once," Eska informed him. The thought pattern of your mentablaster is on file and will be given to myself and the other eight members of the Colonization Board present here. The recording projector is being set up now. As soon as the last connections are made the pattern of your blaster will be projected to you with the power of the nine minds of the Board behind it. Since none of us are under the influence of the creatures before you, the pattern projection will be of absolute precision and irresistible power. Your own mind need serve only as the carrier. The final connections are being made now and you will receive the pattern projection at any moment."

He shook his head, trying to drive the darkness away. It withdrew, slowly and reluctantly, hovering near to close in on him again. His time was running out—all his will and determination could not much longer hold unconsciousness at bay. Time—he needed more time. Susie and the kittens were doing the best they could but their only weapan was the green stare of their eyes. In the end they would break the snake — but he would have to be there to kill it when they did so. If he lost consciousness all would be lost; the snake would use the pistol to kill the cats, it would go on to the cabin where Gwen was . . .

He needed time and he could not have it. He would have to bring it all to a showdown fast—in the little time he did have. Maybe if the cats were closer . . .

He called to Susie. His voice was a vague mutter and he tried again, making it clear. "Susie, come here—snake, Susie—*snake!*"

She came at his call, with the same silent, flowing motion. She stopped close beside him, so near that her whiskers tickled the back of his hand that held the pistol as she stared up at the snake's head and the writhing arms of it.

"The biped has called the largest of the creatures to its side," Sesnar reported. "I can see nothing about the creature capable of harming me but I sense a distinct menace—an utter lack of fear. It *must* possess some means of harming me of which I am unaware, otherwise it would not display this complete lack of fear. The effect

of its stare upon my control over the biped is considerably greater at this close range and I am afraid to delay any longer. I am sure the biped has now weakened sufficiently for me to wrest the weapon from its grasp. I cannot wait any longer or my control over it will be completely gone. Project my menta-blaster pattern as soon as possible but I must take the biped's weapon now and kill it and the other creatures."

"The connections have been made and the charge is building up in the relay now," Eska said. "The moment it reaches full potential you will receive the pattern."

The snake settled lower in its coils until its head was barely a foot higher than his own. "I wish to talk to you," it said, leaning forward a little toward him. "I intend you no harm."

Subterfuge! The foreknowledge of the snake's intention was an electric shock through the haze of pain and sickness. *Subterfuge*—it was trying to put him off guard a little before it snatched the pistol from his hand.

The showdown had come.

He moved with all the desperate quickness his weakness would permit, trying to bring his left hand over in time to help his still-controlled right hand hold onto the pistol. The movement was hardly begun when the hand of the snake flashed out. At the same moment it ordered with all the force at its command: *"Release the weapon!"*

Susie reacted then, instinctively and instantaneously. It was beyond her ability to understand that the snake wanted only the pistol; that it wanted no contact with her. She had been waiting and watching, her eyes and body coordinated like a perfect machine and ready to act at the lightning-fast instant of her command. The snake-like arm darted toward her, as a rattlesnake would strike, and she replied to its threat as she would to the strike of a rattlesnake. Its hand was yet four inches from the pistol when her paw made its invisibly swift slash and the razor-sharp claws laid the soft-scaled hand open in four long gashes.

It flipped its body back at the slash of her claws and the control was suddenly gone, something like a scream coming through the channel where it had been. It was soundless but it was terror, complete and absolute.

Now! The glazed yellow belly was before him and the control was gone. He brought the pistol up, spurred by the frantic fear that the snake would resume control when victory was only a split second away. Up, where the sickening

glaze was so near him—up and in line — The pistol barked, vicious and savage, and the snake lurched from the impact, a small, round hole in the glaze. Up and fire—up and fire—It was as he had wanted it to be when the snake held him helpless; as he raised the pistol and fired, raised and fired, the little black holes ran up the glazed belly while the snake kept lurching from the impacts and leaning farther backward, out over the edge of the trail. There were six of the little black holes in it when it toppled over and fell into the canyon below.

He heard the thump of it as it hit the bottom and he crawled to the rim of the trail to look down at it. It was lying in the sand of the canyon floor, twisting aimlessly, sometimes the dark green back up and sometimes the glistening yellow belly up.

It was twisting and turning as all dead snakes do; it was going nowhere; it was no longer a menace.

He turned away from it and saw that Susie and all the kittens were lined up beside him, looking down at the thing they had helped kill.

"I think," he said to them, "that the hungry old cat and the scrawny kittens we gave a home to one cold, rainy night have repaid us."

He was still in the hospital nine months later—with release a month away—when Earth's first spaceship was completed and the christening ceremony held. The snake-thing's ship had possessed every conceivable kind of weapon as well as the hyper-space drive and the military had been given orders, and unlimited priority, to create a Hyperspace Interceptor Fleet. There had been tapes and records in the ship that had left no doubt as to the snake-thing's mission. Industry had combined genius and mass-production to do the impossible; it had turned out the first complete and fully armed interceptor in less than nine months.

Gwen made her daily visit on the afternoon of the day of the ship's christening.

"This one will be the flagship, I guess you'd call it," she said. "Now that they're tooled up for production, they say they'll be turning out a ship a week."

"The things might try again," he said. "I don't think they will for some time; when Susie struck the snake it let its mind go wide open to my own mind for a moment—not only its mind but I could sense the thoughts of the other ones that it was in communication with—and they were *afraid*. Even the others were afraid, afraid because the one here was terrorized by something it

couldn't control or understand. I think these snake-things got where they are by pure, unemotional logic; they happened to be an older form of life than the ones on the worlds they conquered and their knowledge of physical things, such as weapons, was greater. I suppose they had plans for ultimately conquering every habitable world in the galaxy. They were utterly without mercy in their plans; they, alone, were entitled to life because they, alone, had developed methods of destroying all other forms of life. They knew all about physical laws and they made use of their knowledge to devise weapons that made them invincible. But they overlooked what I like to think is a law higher than any they knew: the law that no species alone, is entitled to survival."

Gwen smiled at him. "The law that causes people to feel sorry for lost and hungry dogs and cats and want to give them a home. It's a good law, and it doesn't have to be written down for people; it's just our nature like it was the nature of that snake-thing to be cold and logical in everything it did."

"And its cold logic caused it to die," he said, "with it, even as it died, still wondering at our illogical affection for other creatures. And speaking of other creatures; how is Susie taking all the publicity and fame?"

"She's completely unphotogenic, and bewildered besides. She just wants to keep on being a common cat and she can't understand why all those people keep coming to see her and take her picture."

"Well—after all, she can't know just how important was the thing she and the kittens did. That thing was a snake and she was a cat; she just did the usual, normal thing for a cat to do."

"She was wanted at the ship's christening today, too," Gwen said. "They wanted her there to go out over all the television channels. I had to put my foot down flat on the idea, though."

"Why?"

Gwen smiled again. "Because she was too busy today doing something else that is the usual, normal thing for a cat to do—she was having kittens."

The End

Watch For MYSTIC Magazine

The Magazine of the Supernatural

JANUARY ISSUE ON SALE OCTOBER 1ST

At last he'd tracked her down. That is, she looked like the right girl, but how could he be sure? Maybe it was all a big mistake, but now was the time to find out.

CONNECTION COMPLETED

By Judith Merril

Illustrated by H. W. McCauley

HELLO, babe. Glad you waited. I couldn't do anything else. She smiled wryly. I'm glad I waited too. Hello.

He saw her through the window, sitting alone in a pool of white light, on a white chair, at a white table, almost exactly centered in the expanse of white-tiled floor. She was wearing the green suit and the grey-green scarf with the narrow border of pink roses on it. Her back was toward him, but he knew

beyond doubt it was she. Her hair, over the scarf, was the same dark mist that floated in his mind, cool and caressing, tickling the filaments of his imagination.

He stood out there on the sidewalk in the chill city drizzle, staring in through the plate-glass window of the cafeteria, waiting for her to make some move, any move that would confirm or deny: to turn around and show her face, looking as he knew it must; or to vanish as suddenly and completely as the elusive fantasy he also knew she had to be. He stood there waiting, mostly, for his own shock to give way to decision. *Go in? Go away?*

"Move along, Mac!"

Todd jerked his head around, eyes wide and startled, then narrowing in anger at the dough-faced cop.

"Is that a new law?" he sneered. "Something wrong with standing on the street?"

"Not so you just stand there," the policeman said; then, in a different tone: "Sorry, doc. It was just the way you were looking in the window."

"Hungry, you mean?" Todd didn't feel like being reasonable. The apology was to his clothes, anyhow; not to him. "Well, I am. You know any better reason to look in restaurant?" If the cop got mad enough, there wouldn't be any impossible decision to make. He'd be in night court, paying a fine, instead.

The cop didn't get mad. He shook his head tiredly and wandered off, muttering. Todd turned back to the window, and the girl had moved.

She was getting up. She had her check in her hand, and she was reaching for her raincoat on the next chair. Immediately, urgently, Todd wanted her not to go.

Sit still, he begged. *You waited this long, don't spoil it now. I'm coming, kid. I shouldn't have stalled like that, but I'm coming in now. Just wait a minute . . .*

He was walking fast up the block toward the door, watching her through the window all the time, and he saw her change her mind and settle back in the chair again. She never turned around. He still hadn't seen her face.

He pushed through the door into warm dry air, struggling with the corners of his mouth, keeping his smile underneath his skin. He couldn't very well walk in on her with a triumphant smirk all over his face. There was no reason to assume that she *knew.*

She didn't; he was sure of that when he saw the baffled defeat in the set of her shoulders as she leaned back in her chair and pick-

ed up the coffee cup again. The cup was empty; *he* knew that. *She* realized it a moment later, and set it down again, and looked up straight ahead of her at the big clock on the wall.

What on earth am I sitting here for? She made a restless, irritable motion toward her raincoat.

Hey, wait a minute! he pleaded. *Don't go now. Just give me time to think of something.*

What did she expect? To have him walk over and say "Pardon me, but aren't you the girl in my dreams?"

She didn't expect anything. She didn't even know who he was. But she turned and looked out the window while he crossed the big room to the counter in back. *It's still raining,* she satisfied herself. *I might as well sit here.* She picked up a folded newspaper, and Todd stared across the perforated metal drip-board of the counter, into a dry, yellow-wrinkled face.

"Coffee—black," he said, and waited while brown liquid flushed slowly out of the urn into a thick tan mug. He tried to find her image in the mirror on the side wall, but the angle was distorting; all he could tell was that she was still there, waiting.

For what?

He wasn't even sure who asked the question, let alone whether it had an answer. He couldn't trust the certainty he felt. He hadn't even seen her face yet.

The dry wrinkled face pushed a mug at him across the counter.

"Sugarncream?"

Todd shook his head. "No, thanks." He fumbled in his pocket for change, cursing his clumsy fingers, suddenly sure she'd be gone when he turned around. Then:

Didn't I say "black" before? he wondered. He had to watch out. Ever since this thing started, he'd been worried about things like that. How could you tell if you were just going off your rocker? How could you know whether you remembered to say things out loud at all?

You did. I heard you.

That's a big help! You *heard me! I can hear you too,* he snapped *at her, and you never said a word out loud! Hell, I don't know if you even* thought *a word!*

He could just as easily be talking to himself. He was, anyhow. Even if this was all real, actually happening—even if he wasn't just tripping a light fantastic down the path to a padded cell—he was still just talking to himself, effectively, until he was sure that she *knew.* And he was now almost sure she didn't.

Stop fighting it, man! It's real, all right.

He had the dime in his hand fi-

nally, flung it across the counter, picked up his mug, slopping coffee over the sides, and headed toward her table, with the familiar feeling of her smile lingering in his head after the words began to fade.

The place was almost empty. There was no excuse for sitting at her table—except the obvious one, that he had come in for just that purpose. He sat down directly across from her, took one quick look at her face, and it was all wrong. It wasn't the face that went with the green suit. She wasn't smiling. And she didn't seem to be aware that he was there.

Todd burned his tongue on his coffee, and took another look over the edge of the cup. This time he caught her by surprise, and she turned away swiftly when their glances met. She *was* aware of him, then; and she was frightened!

Scared stiff! she assured him. *You're not real. I don't believe in you. Get out of here, will you? God damn it, get out!*

The vehemence of it almost convinced him. He wouldn't be shrieking at himself that way—or would he? What did he know about how a person feels inside when he's slipping his gears? It made sense for her to feel just as scared and mad inside as he did. . . but if the whole thing was originating inside his own mind, it made even *more* sense for her to sound that way . . .

He knew just where that train of thought went: round and around and all the way back round again. He put down his coffee cup, made a face over it, and looked straight at her.

"Would you pass the sugar please?" he said, and waited, watching.

She was scared, all right. Scared, or very tired, or both. He noticed, now, that there were long deep lines running down from the inside corners of her eyes, along her nose, outlining tight-bunched cheek muscles; another set of lines striking down from the edges of her mouth; a taut set of defiance to her jaw. And in the same instant, he realized her eyes were grey-green like the scarf, as he knew they ought to be, and her lipstick was soft coral-pink like the roses on the scarf.

She was reaching for the jar of sugar automatically. Her face showed no reaction, no memory of what he *thought* had happened a few minutes earlier, at the counter. He tried transposing her features in his mind, setting them in the other expression, the only one he'd "seen" before, relaxing all the tense muscles, turning up the lips into a smile of warm acceptance. . .

"Here," she said impatiently, holding the jar under his nose. He

looked from her face to her hand and back again, wondering how long she'd been holding it there while he stared at her. If she was the wrong girl—*if there was no right girl*—

There was a very small smile on her face now. Nothing like the look he was used to, but enough so he was certain it was the same face.

Well, do you want it or don't you?

She meant the sugar, he realized after an instant's shock. "Thanks. I don't usually use it," he started to explain, and watched the same struggle on her face that he remembered feeling on his own as he walked into the place: the effort to suppress apparently unwarranted laughter. He let the explanation drift off, and realized he'd done what he'd been worried about all this time: answered aloud what he had heard only inside his ears.

In that case, she could be laughing at him—or politely *not* laughing—just because of his confusion and inanity. She could . . . she could be anything or anyone, but she also *could be* the girl who had haunted his waking and sleeping dreams for the last six months.

"Thanks," he said again, and relieved her of the sugar jar.

You'll have to think up something better than that. I can't just keep sitting here much longer . . .

You're welcome," she said. *I thought you were . . . I imagined a sort of a fluent character, Not the tongue-tied kind!*

I don't usually have so much trouble. You're not yourself exactly, either . . . "Pardon me, miss," he asked courteously, "I wonder if you happen to know whether there's a postoffice open anywhere near here? At this hour, I mean?" *Pretty feeble, I know, babe, but you're rushing me.*

"I don't think . . . there's one that *might* be open, but I'm not sure. It's just about five blocks. You turn left at the corner, and . . ."

He didn't listen to the rest. He didn't need a postoffice for anything.

Oh, my God! her voice screamed inside his head. *What am I doing now? I've never seen this man before. I don't, I don't, I don't know who he is or anything about him! He looks like . . . like like somebody I invented. But that's an accident. It has to be! Daydreaming isn't so bad. Anybody who's lonely daydreams. But when you get it mixed up with reality . . .*

Yeah, I know. It's time to look up a good old-fashioned psychiatrist and confess all your guilts. I know. Don't think you're the only one, kid . . .

He watched her eyes flick to the

phone booth in the corner, and realized he'd meant "in the directory," when he said, "look up."

There was a way to find out after all!

"I suppose I could call from here and find out if they're open," he said. *Calm yourself, fella,* he told himself. You could have *thought about the directory after she looked that way. It's hard to tell for sure about subjective time-sequence . . .*

The thing to do was to set it up ahead of time, make sure she knew what he was doing—or as sure as he could be—and then see what happened.

"That's a good idea," she said flatly, and began making motions at her handbag and raincoat again. It took Todd a moment to untangle his reactions. She was answering, of course, his remark about calling the post office.

"Nasty weather," he said brightly. "Hate to go wandering around there for nothing." *Please, babe . . . stick it out a little bit longer . . . I know I'm being dumb, but I don't know much about picking up dames. . .*

Well, I don't get picked up!

"Would you care for some more coffee?" he said desperately, rising before she could get her things together and stand up herself. "Could I bring it back?" *Listen,* he pleaded, *Listen good now. If you want to try a real test of this thing, listen to me a minute . . .*

She hesitated, holding the bag in her hand, her arm half-extended toward the next chair where her raincoat was draped over the back of the seat.

Now listen: if you want to find out, once and for all, let me know by putting your bag in your other hand, and then putting it down on the table. This isn't the test, now, this is just a signal to let me know you understand . . . put your bag in your other hand, and then on the table . . . okay?

"Wel-l-l-l . . . thank you." She smiled nervously. And transferred the purse form her right hand to her left, then set it down, carefully, as though any slightest extra jarring might explode it.

Todd heard himself saying smoothly, naturally, "Do you take cream and sugar?" It was startling that his voice should behave so well, when every nerve cell and fiber in him was vibrating with incredulous exultation. He wanted to reach out and grab her, hold her face between his two hands, pull her head to rest on his shoulder, soothe, explain, reassure, until the sharp-etched lines of fear and tension vanished from her face, and he could see her, *really her,* not in a dream or vision or in some unknown receptive part of his mind, but see her in the

flesh, smiling with her whole face as she always had before.

And he couldn't do it.

Not yet.

He'd planned that first request to be a signal, nothing more. It wasn't enough to go on. It could be coincidence, accident; he might even have anticipated from some unconscious memory of an earlier action of hers, that that move was the one she'd make, and so have set up the signal to get the answer he wanted.

This time it wouldn't be like that.

"I'll make that phone call, and bring the coffee back with me," he told her slowly and distinctly. She nodded, and then he thought as clearly as he could:

Only if you hear me, baby, if you understand and want to believe it like I do, don't wait for me to bring it back. You get the coffees while I'm in the booth. You understand? Do you, babe? You get the coffees while I go in the phone booth . . . then I'll know for sure. You wouldn't do that for any other reason, see? That way I'll know. You just do that, and you can leave the rest to me . . . Understand?

She was nodding again *All right. Go ahead. I understand.* But there was a feeling of irritation—or impatience? He couldn't tell. *Go on. Hurry up.*

Impatience. He turned and walked across the white-tiled floor, his heels sounding loud and hollow all the way. He didn't look around. He was sure she understood. He knew she was somehow irritated. He didn't know what she would do. But what he had to do was walk across the endless rows of tiles to the phone-booth, and not give himself any chance to give her a signal of any kind—in case he was wrong.

He didn't trust himself to give her enough time if he faked it, so he looked up the postoffice in the directory and stepped into the booth, pulled the door shut, without ever looking around, put his coin into the slot, and let the number ring twenty times before he hung up again and stepped out.

He glanced at the counter, and the wrinkle-faced man was leaning back against the wall next to the coffee urn, turning a racing form over in his hand. He looked toward the table, then, and she was gone.

Handbag, raincoat, green suit, scarf, and all. Gone.

You little fool!

The thought was hopeless and tender and the loneliest thought of his life. He was at the door, looking out, up and down the block, but she was gone completely, vanished, like. . .

Like the illusion she was?

He went back to the table, or

tried to. He couldn't find it. He wanted to see her coffee cup there; he thought she might have left the newspaper she was reading. Something, anything, to prove she'd been there, flesh and blood, a real girl. Not just an image his own mind had made for him to live with and talk to—and love.

Nothing. All the tables in the center of the room were clear and clean. There was a busboy dumping cups and clattering silver in the far corner. Todd strode over, stood behind the boy, and couldn't think what to say.

"Did you take two cups off a table over there?" It sounded ridiculous.

The busboy looked around, sleepy, stupid, glazed-eyed. "Huh?"

I said, "Did you take some coffee cups off a table just now?"

"Sure, doc. That's what they pay me for."

Todd shook his head impatiently, like clicking a telephone receiver, trying to clear the line. "Look," he said slowly. "Right about the middle of the room there's a table I was sitting at. Then I went to the phone booth. When I came back, the dishes were gone. Did you just clear that table off?"

"Listen, Mister, if you wasn't done with your coffee, you shouldn't of left it there. All I know is, a table is empty, I clear it off. How should I know . . ."

"I was done." He made himself relax outwardly, realizing that his stance, his voice, his eyes were all threatening the youngster. "It's all right. I was finished. All I want to know is, were there . . . did you take a newspaper off of there?"

"A paper?" The boy looked doubtfully at the bottom rack of his pushwagon. "Lessee now . . . there was a paper on one of them tables. . . " He reached and brought forth a folded sheet. Todd gazed at it helplessly. He hadn't noticed which paper she was reading. He couldn't tell if that was the one.

"Did you . . . was that on a table with *two coffee cups?*"

"Gee, mister, I don't know . . ." The boy was really trying to remember, Todd realized with surprise. Trying hard. "Yeah, I guess . . . listen, mister, if it's so important, I won't kid you. I don't know, that's all, see?"

"Okay, kid. Thanks. Thanks a lot." Todd fished a bill out of his pocket, pushed it into the startled boy's hand, and turned and walked out. Where to, he didn't know; but he had to get out of there. The girl wasn't coming back, that much he was sure of. That is, if there *was* a girl. If ever there had been a girl with a green suit and a mist of dark hair, and a face that smiled for him in his memory.

It was cold and wet outside, and that suited him fine. He paced the sidewalk, out of lamplight into shadow, and back into damp reflections of the light. Mica particles in the grey cement flashed like tiny distant stars or signalling fireflies under his eyes. Unseen drops of moisture chilled the back of his neck, damped the edge of his collar. He stepped off the curb, and a car screeched, braking, around the corner, avoiding him by inches.

All these things he perceived, but without meaning. Perception was suddenly a frightening thing, to be examined and tested every time before you could trust it. What you saw was not necessarily there at all. What you wanted, you could not see, or else you saw without reality. He felt the cold rain on his skin, but put no faith in it, because it was all a part of the girl and the night and the illusion he had made for himself.

He turned a corner, walking faster. No sense trying to avoid obstacles, or dodge moving objects, if you didn't know for sure that they were there. He crossed another street and walked faster still. He didn't know where he was going, and if he knew it wouldn't matter because when he got to the end of the journey he still wouldn't know where he was.

The city flashed its distractions. Sights and sounds and odors, moisture, temperature, touch assailed him and could not penetrate his isolation.

A man lives all his life inside the wall of his own skull, making words into sentences, moving muscles to form gestures, so that he can make his existence and purposes known to others; and in the same way, absorbing his perceptions of the people and things around him, trying to interpret as best he can, so as to understand some part of their meaning for himself. But he never gets outside the bony barriers of his own head, or past the hardening defenses of others. For every human being, each word and gesture has some slightly different meaning. No two people ever meet completely, without some slight or great distortion of intent or understanding occuring in the jangled complexity of living cells that make up the expressive and interpretive mechanisms of a man.

Todd Harmacher made this discovery, as most men do, when he was very small. Each contact of the thirty-odd years since had served to confirm it. Each contact, that is, until for a few brief minutes this evening he had let himself believe that he was truly, entirely, in communication with another human being, rather than with some strange-

ly-shaped and ill-portented figure of his own imagination.

Now he paced the city streets, oblivious to rain and cold, defying noise and light, aware of the unseeable far horizon of his future loneliness more sharply than he had ever been aware of it before.

He crossed another street and turned a corner, for no reason except the inner urgency that said, *Turn! Here! Now!*

Stop!

He stopped.

Perception invaded him. He was standing in front of an old stone building, a relic of the city's first pride in size and strength, grey and massive and dirty. A lamp-post down the street threw a flood of light along the rain-soaked sidewalk, but the doorway directly in front of him was dark. And her smiling face was in his head again, framed by the soft scarf, the drifting mist of her hair touching gently against the bitterness and anger in his mind.

I'm sorry, dear, she told him, *but I got so scared! I used to think I made you up, then for a while I thought you were real. Then I told myself that was nonsense, and I learned to live with a dream . . .*

I know, I know!

And then when I saw you, I got frightened. And when I started doing things I didn't mean to do ...

Poor darling! I shouldn't have ...

No! Don't you see? That's when I knew it was real!

But then . . .?

But then I knew you still didn't believe it yourself, and I thought, if I did as you asked each time, you'd never never know which one of us it was, or whether I was really there. So . . . so when you weren't looking, I ran out, and came here and called you and waited. . .

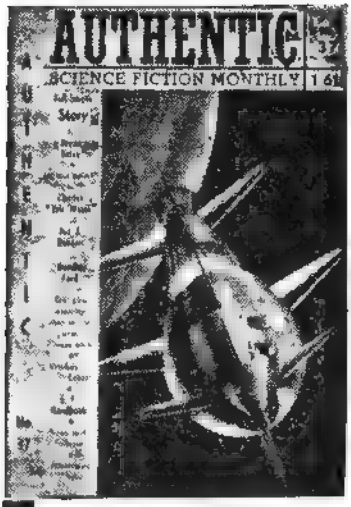
He could see her in the darkness of the doorway, but he *knew.* They both knew now. He knew, too, what her face would look like if he could see it at this moment, but, *knowing,* he didn't have to see it.

"Hi, babe," he said, stepping forward gladly into the dark doorway. "I'm glad you waited."

"I couldn't do anything else," she said wryly. Then he opened his arms to her, and she said, "I'm glad I waited, too. Hello."

THE END

★ ★ ★



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Ray Palmer, Universe Science Fiction, Amherst, Wisc.

"I'M a very busy man," said the editor.

"I know," said his visitor. "I won't take long."

"You can't," said the editor. "I have too much to do. Sit down."

"Thank you," said the visitor, sitting down.

"Now," said the editor. "What is it?"

"First," said the visitor. "I'd better tell you who I am. Doctor Philip Lambert. Medical doctor. And I've been to three psychiatrists. They all said I was sane, that I haven't been having hallucinations."

"Okay," said the editor. "What haven't you been imagining?" He looked at his watch.

Lambert leaned forward. "Patrick Henry is dead."

The editor stared at him. Finally: "This your idea of a joke?"

Lambert shook his head. "No. He died in my house at eight-seven last night."

The editor waved his hand between Lambert and himself, palm out. "Wait a minute," he said. "The only Patrick Henry I know lived during the Revolution."

Lambert nodded. "That's the one."

The editor stood up. "Three psychiatrists said you weren't nuts?"

"That's right."

"Give me liberty, or give me death!" was merely a quotation from a history book to Dr. Lambert until Patrick Henry walked into his office and complained of suffering from a chronic headache.

OR GIVE ME DEATH

By Donald E. Westlake

Illustrated by H. W. McCauley

"*They* were nuts."

"They talked to Patrick."

The editor stood behind his desk, staring at Lambert, and then walked over to the door, hung a home-made sign saying, 'Go Away' on it, closed it, and returned to his desk. He sat down. "Okay," he said. "Tell me. I believe anything."

Lambert smiled thinly. "He came to me about four months ago.

Of course, I didn't know then who he was. To me, he was just a bent old man, very thickly lined of face, who came to me for relief from a chronic headache. I couldn't find any superficial reason for the headache, so I gave him a thorough examination.

What I found was astonishing, impossible. A bit of metal, probably a bullet, embedded in his brain. A faint scar, caused by a deep wound years before, on his heart. Other things. He should have been dead a dozen times. Besides, he was a lot older than anyone I've ever examined before. He should have long since been dead of old age, if nothing else.

After I'd examined him, I sat and looked at him for a while, trying to make some sense out of it. Things that would kill any human being hadn't killed him. Why? After a while, I asked him, "When were you shot?"

He looked at me oddly. "Why?"

"It should have killed you."

"Eighteen twenty three."

He said it just like that, and it was a minute before I caught it. *Eighteen* twenty three!

"How old are you?" I asked him.

"Two hundred and seventeen," he said.

I got to my feet, backed away from him. "What are you? What do you want from me?"

"The word to use is *who*, not what," he said calmly. "I'm Patrick Henry, and I want you to do something about this headache."

"Patrick Henry's dead," I said.

He shrugged. "They buried him anyway. In 1799."

"Do you mean you're a spirit?"

"Hell, no," he said. "I'm as alive as you are. Probably more."

I sat down again, feeling weak. "I don't get it. How can you be Patrick Henry? How can you be alive at all, whoever you are?"

"I'll tell you," said Patrick. "Remember that speech I made, when I said, 'Give me liberty or give me death'?"

I nodded.

"Somebody in the hereafter must have been feeling prankish. That's the only way I can figure it out. They decided I wanted one or the other, that I was giving them the choice. They gave me liberty."

"You mean they refused to give you death?"

"Right."

"By golly," I said. "That's wonderful. Immortality!"

"Bah!" he snorted. "When a man's outlived his time, he should stop living and quit cluttering up the world. Living gets to be a bore after a while. Why, when I first realized I couldn't die, I was overjoyed. I soon got sick of it, though. So I tried to give the humorist a hint. I got myself buried. For a year and a half I lay six feet under, with no air and no food, but I didn't die. I got so hungry I ate my clothes and the lining of the coffin, but I didn't die."

"How did you ever manage to get out?" I asked him.

"Some damfool young medical student dug me up to experiment on. Huh. He almost needed a coffin himself when I sat up and said hello."

"I can imagine," I said. And it *was* somehow funny. I could imagine the scene. Then I thought of something else. "How is it nobody knows about you?" I asked him.

"A few people do," he said. "But if I went before a whole crowd, they'd think I was a vaudeville act, or a television mimic, and if I wrote to a magazine or a newspaper, they'd put it in their letter column as the gag of the month. A couple of the people who knew me tried, but they either wound up in a padded cell, or were laughed out of town. Besides who cares about Patrick Henry any more?"

"You could get a government pension," I said. "Live in a vine-covered cottage outside Richmond and write delicate little stories about the Revolution."

"Young man," said Patrick, rising to his feet and glowering, with the old oratorical fire in his eye, "do you realize that if you spell the Revolution with a small r you have something that one of your politicians just recently said always leads to tyranny? Do you realize that I, and all the others with me were a bunch of subversives? Men who refused to do their duty as citizens and pay taxes for the mutual security and national defense of the British empire, who stored up loads of munitions in hiding places, who *plotted to overthrow the government*? More than that, they *did* overthrow the government. Dammit man, those aren't your forebears, I think all those men were sterile, and only the Tories, the loyal, conforming Tories, had any children. Bunch of mealy-mouthed welfare statists! Bah!"

I was a little taken aback by Patrick's sudden blast, but I said, "You're confused. It's the welfare statists who are trying to overthrow the government."

"What?" He actually got purple in the face. "Social security, public power, unemployment, insurance, free college education, all the rest of it, the stupid junk they've been cramming down the Tories' gullible gullets, and you try to tell me its the welfare statists who are trying to overthrow the government? Hell, man, they *are* the government."

"What's wrong with Social Security and free college educations?" I asked. "They're progressive."

"Progressive! If I told you suicide was progressive, you'd run out and kill yourself. There's nothing wrong with government insurance. But there's *everything* wrong with *compulsory* government insurance. And giving everybody college educations. What are most of them going to do with all that pretty knowledge? All they're going to do is be unhappy all their lives because they were prepared for a better job than the one they got. There aren't enough jobs needing a college education for all these young boobs. Somebody's going to have to dig the coal and make the undershirts."

He clutched his stomach in unfond reminiscence. "Oh, the stomach ache I got when Social Security went through! I couldn't eat anything but liquids for three weeks."

"I don't get it," I said. "What did Social Security have to do with your stomach?"

"Every time the United States loses some of its liberty, I get closer to death. They even off in me all the time. My health and the nation's freedom. The Civil War

conscription gave me a heart murmur. The First World War conscription gave me high blood pressure. This one gave me coronary thrombosis. Excise taxes laid me low for two months.

"Of course, there've been times when I was in worse shape than I'm in right now. When the Alien and Sedition Act was passed, I went stone deaf, blind in the right eye, and paralyzed from the waist down. During prohibition, it was my right arm that was paralyzed. Couldn't bend my elbow to save myself."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Are you doing anything special, got any important engagements, anything like that?"

He shook his head. "No. Why?"

"How would you like to live at my house? I have plenty of room, and all the privacy you want. I'd like to examine you some more."

He thought for a while. "All right," he said at last. "As long as it's examine, not investigate. I've had a beautiful set of ulcers since that word took on its new meaning."

"By the way," I said. "Your headache. How long have you had it?"

"About three weeks," he said.

"You said your ills come from lost liberties. What liberty did we lose three weeks ago? I thought for a minute. "Around the first of the year. End of '54, beginning of '55. What liberty did we lose then?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know," he said. "Sometimes I get the ache before the thing becomes public. Whatever it is, we'll know about it soon enough. And, whatever it is, the Tories all over the country will welcome it with open arms, as long as somebody tells them it's progressive. Bah!"

"Don't be bitter," I told him. "You'd be murder in a political discussion."

"I can back up my statements with diseases," he said.

"I'll close the office now," I said, "and take you round to my house."

I closed the office and brought him home.

There was a long pause. Then, the editor said, "Is that all?"

"Just about," said Lambert. "I examined him some more, did what I could for the headache. He claimed it was getting worse. He first came to me three months ago. After a week, I went to see a psychiatrist. He suggested I go away somewhere for a nice long rest, so I brought him home to talk to Patrick. He went home dazed, but convinced that I was sane and Patrick was alive and, well, *Patrick*. I got a written statement from him and from two other psychiatrists.

Just in case I ever wanted to tell anyone about this without Patrick around, for proof." Lambert reached into his breast pocket, withdrew a flat envelope. "Here they are," he said.

The editor looked at the notes. He knew the names signed to the bottom of them. All three said that Doctor Philip Lambert was sane, that Patrick Henry lived, and that Lambert's account of him was correct.

"Okay," said the editor, dropping the notes on his desk. "Say I believe you. So what? Do you want some free publicity for Patrick, or what?"

Lambert shook his head. "I told you. Patrick died last night, at eight-seven."

"Then what *do* you want?" asked the editor. "Just an obituary notice?"

"No, no, *no*," said Lambert impatiently. "Didn't I tell you that Patrick had received liberty instead of death, that until all liberty was gone from the United States, *he could not die?*"

"What are you trying to say?" asked the editor.

"That at eight-seven last night, we lost the last of our liberties. I don't know what it was, what happened, anything about it. All I know is that this is no longer a free nation."

"Now that's enough," said the editor. "There I can check you up. I run a paper here, and I put in it anything I want to put in it. I say whatever I feel like saying. If I couldn't, then this wouldn't be a free country. But I can, so your Patrick Henry story is a lot of—"

The door opened and two men walked in.

THE END

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Kate and Mike had caused the trouble, so the professor reasoned that it was up to them to do something about it.

MINOR MIRACLE

By Richard O. Lewis

MAYOR Botley was relaxing in his big leather chair beside the table-model radio which was playing something unpretentious from one of the old masters. His glasses were high upon his freckle-blotched forehead, his eyes were closed, the newspaper had fallen across his ample stomach, and he was snoring softly, almost apologetically.

The closing of the back door screen did not arouse him, nor did the heavy footsteps of his wife as she crossed the kitchen and entered the livingroom.

Mrs. Botley surveyed her husband briefly, then sat down in a chair by the table and wiped the glow from her florid face with a torn bandana of blue.

"Mike and Kate have been at it again," she announced. Mrs. Bittendopf just informed me."

The mayor stirred but did not quite open his eyes. "Burying bones?"

"Right in the middle of her cabbages. Last time it was her tulips. Now it's her cabbages. And such big dogs, too! My, it's warm." She wiped her face again.

The mayor drew a long and thoughtful breath that moved the newspaper, then let it out again. "The dogs have got to go," he said judicially. "Their owners were warned once before. Can't have such goings ons in Sprigville. The dogs have got to go! It has been so decreed! Probably get a rain sometime this evening."

Mrs. Botley pulled herself up from her chair, lumbered out the front door to the sidewalk, and turned left. The great elms, interlacing green branches high above the street, made an avenue of cool shade. But the shade lessened the flow of perspiration only slightly.

Half way down the next block, Mrs. Byde was mowing her bit of lawn in front of her flower-bordered, white house. Mrs. Botley paused long enough to catch her

breath and deliver the ultimatum. "The dogs have got to go," she whispered across the fence. "The mayor has decreed so. Warm, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Byde.

She left the lawnmower where it was, stepped gingerly over a flower bed, and went hurriedly along the little walk-way around the house in the direction of the alley which separated her back yard from that belonging to her neighbor, Mrs. Bittendopf.

The shade gave way to the glare of the two-block-long business district of Sprigville. Mrs. Botley turned in at the postoffice, squinted into her empty box, then paused at the stamp window.

"The dogs have got to go," she told the postmaster. "The mayor decreed so not two minutes ago."

The postmaster rubbed the gray stubble on his chin. "'Bout time," he admitted, reflectively. "Dogs burying bones in gardens is a nuisance."

In the butcher's shop next door, Mrs. Botley selected a pound of oleo, a package of clothespins, and the third loaf of bread she had cautiously pinched for freshness.

"The dogs have got to go," she told the butcher as he wrote down the purchases in her account book. "The mayor has decreed it. He said so just a few minutes ago. Warm!"

The butcher nodded.

He waited until Mrs. Botley left the store, then he rolled up his apron, tucked it carefully into the top of his trousers, put on a straw hat that had once been a dress-up hat, and went out the back door. He entered the back yard of the brown house across the alley.

Mrs. Nillen opened the back door to his second series of rappings. She was dressed in a house smock of gay print and, as was usual with her, had a ready smile. "Why, hello," she said. "What brings you out on such a hot day?"

The butcher took off his hat and wiped his brow with the back of a moist hand. "Just hurried over to tell you the news," he said. "Mrs. Botley was in just a minute ago. She said that the mayor had definitely decided that you had to get rid of Mike and Kate. Guess old swanky-pants Bittendopf has been complainin' again."

"Just look at this back yard!" Mrs. Nillen invited. "The weeds are taking it! And that ash pile hasn't been cleaned up since this time last year!"

"Maybe I could send one of the boys over to help out . . . ".

I guess somebody'll have to do it. I can't depend on Mr.

Nillen. He's so interested in his old books that he can't remember from one day till the next anything I tell him."

The butcher nodded his understanding. He couldn't quite visualize the "Professor", as the townspeople called Mr. Nillen, doing anything about the ashes even if he *did* remember it. "Well, I just thought I'd come over and tell you about the dogs . . . "

"I'll see what I can do. I'll tell Mr. Nillen, but I doubt if he'll get around to doing anything. You know how he is . . . " She made a gesture of heplessness with her hands. "Certainly going to be a hot day!"

"It's a lot hotter now than it was this time yesterday," he butcher admitted.

Feeling a bit sorry for Mrs. Nillen, he began retracing his steps toward the back door of his shop. Well, he'd done all *he* could do. Such a *nice* woman, too. Friendly. Good talker. People liked her. She wasn't at all like the professor. Good thing she *was* so well liked, too, otherwise the school board might have fired the professor from the local highschool a year or two ago. They still remembered that pointless and boring talk he had given a couple years ago during the graduation exercises. Had talked a full hour about some old coot who had taken hemlock to poison himself.

Not very many of the kids liked him, either, and he didn't mingle at all with the townspeople. Couldn't even remember anyone's name. The butcher shook his head sadly and opened his back door. And there was that time when he had hopped about in the front yard in plain daylight with a ball, playing toss-and-catch with himself like a six-year-old. Ball wasn't a regular ball, either. Sometimes when he threw it up in the air it would stay up there for nearly a half minute before falling down again. And when some people stopped on the front sidewalk to watch him, he got so mad that he threw the ball up in the air so hard that it never did comeback down—at least no one ever saw it again. Yes, everyone liked Mrs. Nillen—and felt just a little sorry for her . . .

Professor Nillen didn't look up from his thick book when his wife entered the livingroom and crossed over to the windowed alcove that served him as reading room and library. His high forehead, topped by short-cropped hair of iron gray, was creased in its habitual thought pattern. His deep-set, black eyes,

unaided by glasses, were focused upon the book with such world-detaching intent that they seemed to be looking through the pages rather than at them.

"The dogs have got to go."

Mrs. Nillen waited for the space of a long breath, then said it again. "The dogs have got to go. The mayor decided it just a few minutes ago."

Professor Nillen closed a long finger into the book to mark his place, raised his head slightly, and gazed long and thoughtfully into the space directly ahead of him. The Greek title of the book, translated, was *Miracle, Mystery, and Mechanology*. It was one of several he owned that had been written and compiled by a group of Chinese philosophers.

"Dog has been the benefactor and protector of Man for untold ages," he reasoned, a note of bitterness in his low tones. "It is extremely doubtful if humanity could have survived without their aid. And now the mayor has decided to render them into extinction." He shook his head slowly. "Whatever could possess him?"

"I don't mean *all* dogs," hastened his wife. "I mean Mike and Kate. *They've* got to go!"

Professor Nillen looked relieved, but annoyed. He opened his book again and refocused his eyes. "But why bother me about simple acts of nature? If they've got to go, they've got to go."

"I don't mean *that*, either!"

Professor Nillen's annoyance heightened visibly. He reclosed his finger into the book. "One of the many strange things about human beings," he said, pointedly, "is how they can persist in distorting the semantics of a reasonably lucid language to the extent of conveying ideas so remote from the intended. Just what *do* you mean?"

Mrs. Nillen sat down upon the arm of the davenport near him. This, she guessed, might take some little time. "I am speaking of Mike and Kate," she explained. "They have been burying bones in Mrs. Bittendopf's garden, uprooting her cabbages."

Professor Nillen shook his head and sighed. "I knew the race was degenerating rapidly, but I didn't expect it to reach this low point of decline for at least another fifteen or twenty years . . . "

"Dogs!" shouted Mrs. Nillen. "Mike and Kate are dogs! *Our* dogs!"

"But we have no dogs . . . "

"Kate came to our door in the middle of the winter, cold and half starved. I fed her. A month or so later, Mike came along and

. . . well, fell in love with her —or whatever dogs do—and stayed. Now the two dogs are burying bones in neighboring gardens and the owners are complaining. The mayor says that we have to get rid of the dogs."

Professor Nillen, knowing well the limitations of the average human brain and ever alert to its falacious reasoning, considered carefully the purport of his wife's statements. "The presence of bones presupposes the existance of meat," he reasoned. "Our daily menu, however, wholly denies that assumption."

"The butcher tosses the bones to them out the back door of his shop."

Professor Nillen nodded his understanding and opened his book again. "The usual faulty logic," he announced. "The typical *homo sapien* proclivity for treating the symptom instead of the cause. The answer is simple: eliminate the butcher."

Mrs. Nillen sprang from the arm of the davenport. "I don't see how you have brains enough to teach school!" she cried in exasperation.

"I don't, really," he admitted, after giving the switch in conversation careful thought. "In fact, no one does. The offspring of the *homo sapien* does not lend itself readily to instruction. After twelve or thirteen years of nearly constant proximity to various and sundry branches of knowledge, it emerges from the painful ordeal less fitted to its environment than a day-old annelid. In some cases it can neither read, write, speak, nor understand its native language . . . "

"And the lawn needs mowing!" she flung at him.

Raising his eyes slowly from the book, Professor Nillen turned his head questioningly toward his wife. The thought-lines of his forehead were deepened with perplexity. "I experience grave difficulties in following your disconnected thought processes sufficiently to comprehend how the lawn became involved in the conversation. I fail to recognize any possible sequence . . . "

"Dogs—on the lawn! Bones—in the grass! Lawnmower—bumping the bones! *Lawn needs mowing!*"

The professor nodded his head in slow comprehension. "Typical of the human mind," he affirmed. "It toils mightily through the trivia to arrive gloriously at the unimportant."

"All the lawns in the block are neatly trimmed. Ours is a mess!"

"The world is filled with mystery and miracle," mused the professor, "and human beings wander through it, oblivious. They live and die, never quite understanding —or even attempting to understand —the miracle of Life itself. They struggle through gravity and dismiss it with a Newtonian shrug. They glance at the myriad stars of night and attribute their existance to whatever divinity happens to be in popular favor in their particular part of the world. Ignoring miracle, they cozen trivia. They speak of food, clothing, dogs, gardens, lawns, the probable state of the weather, and the progress of the neighbor's wife's pregnancy with no understanding or probing of the greater mystery behind any of it. Miracles occur beneath their noses every hour of the day, but their minds are so cluttered and distorted with the over-load of nonessentials that they cannot grasp the presence of the miracles without immediately becoming side-tracked and hopelessly lost again in the labyrinthian forests . . . "

Mrs. Nillen unclinched her teeth sufficiently to grind out, "You've got to do something! *You've go to do something about the dogs!*"

Professor Nillen's dark eyes came slowly back from their sojourn into the thought world to focus again upon the present. "The dogs? Oh, yes. The dogs." He allowed himself another moment of deep thought. "I shall attempt to attack the problem with the simplicity it seems to deserve," he decided, finally. "First, let us pose the question: Did *I* bury the bones in Mrs. Bittendopf's garden? The answer, obviously, is no. Second: Did the *dogs* bury the bones in Mrs. Bittendopf's garden? Indications are to the affirmative. Therefore, logic dictates quite plainly that the dogs, rather than I, should be consulted concerning the . . . "

"Oh . . . oh, hell!" Mrs. Nillen strode out of the room. "Go . . . go talk to the dogs yourself!" she cried. "Go . . . " Wherever else she might have told him to go was lost in the noise of clattering pots and pans.

Professor Nillen reviewed the conversation animadversively from its beginning to its ending. One by one, he brought each successive point into light for complete inspection, staying longest upon his wife's last coherent statement. Finally, he put a marker into his book, laid it carefully upon the table beside his chair, arose, and went out into the shade of the

front porch. Several dogs were playing a lethargic game of nip-and-dodge in the deep grass.

"Mike! Kate!" he called. "Come here. The rest of you fellows go along home."

Two dogs detached themselves from the group and came to sit quietly in front of the porch. The others hesitated a moment, then lowered their tails to half mast—those that had tails—and went dog-trotting away in as many directions as there were dogs.

The professor surveyed the two dogs before him. One was quite huge, broad of head and shoulder, white and silky of pelt, and of an unguessable genealogy. Its brown, intelligent eyes were those of a dreamer. The other was an Airedale-Collie-Shepherd type with dirty black and brown hair, a narrow head, close-set eyes, and dejected ears.

"Which of you is Mike?" the professor asked.

The white dog wagged its tail.

"And you fell in love with this . . . this critter?"

"She is not a critter," said Mike. "She is a dog! And a beautiful one, at that!"

Kate lowered her head demurely until the tips of her long ears dangled coyly about the dribbles at the end of her pointed nose.

"Be that as it may," resumed the professor, "it has been brought forcefully to my attention that you have been disturbing the indigenous peace of his neighborhood by burying bones in gardens."

"Bones make excellent fertilization," defended Mike. "Given enough time."

"True." Professor Nillen nodded his agreement. "But human beings do not understand that. They see only the obvious, perceive only that which a limited intelligence permits."

"We thought it was better to bury them than to leave them lying in the yard," said Mike. "Just in case you might want to mow it . . . "

"Oh, yes. The lawn." The dark eyes of the professor encompassed the situation at a glance. "Please step up here on the porch out of the way for a moment."

A leap carried the dogs to his side.

Professor Nillen made a casual flip of the fingers toward the shaggy grass. A shimmering flame of pastel blue rippled across the front yard in the twinkle of an eye, leaving behind it a well-trimmed lawn.

"Couple of bones there you overlooked," he reprimanded.

Mike nodded. "We'll take care of them immediately, sir. We'll bury . . . Oops! Sorry."

"You must realize," the professor explained, "that, for your own well-being, you must conform to the existing decadence. Now talk it over between you and try to arrive at a logical solution that will be illogical enough to meet the requirements of an alogical species."

So saying, he returned into the house, sat down, picked up his book, and resumed his interrupted mystagoguery.

Mrs. Botley entered her back door a few minutes after the conclusion of a satisfying visit with Mrs. Bittendopf. Mrs. Bittendopf had agreed with her wholeheartedly that it was the warmest day of the season. She crossed the kitchen and entered the living-room just as Mayor Botley turned from closing the front door. "Visitors?" she asked.

Mayor Botley nodded. "Mike and Kate. They stopped by to tell me that they wouldn't bury any more bones." He let himself down into the confines of his leather chair. "They're going to pile them up back of the butcher shop when they have finished with them. Seemed like purty smart dogs."

Mrs. Botley sat down in the straight chair beside the table. "That was real nice of them," she said, wiping ineffectually at her face with her overly-moist bandana. "Coming by on such a hot day, too . . . "

"Probably get a rain sometime this evening," predicted the mayor.

"Well, does ANYONE remember filling the fuel tanks?"

Fran had to have a dog, and quickly. Since they were extinct on Earth, he went to Gallipago, home planet of the Gypsies; but someone should have warned him that Gypsies drive a hard bargain.

CARAVAN

By H. A. Stucke

Illustrated by H. W. McCauley

THEIR origin was as much a mystery as ever, even though they had progressed from pony carts to Cadillacs to spaceships. Dark-skinned, laughable, unscrupulous, they sped across the Galaxy and occasionally stopped to ply their ancient trades and leave amusement or annoyance in their wake.

Completely unamalgamated with civilization, they practised their traditional way of life. Should they land on a planet with a breathable atmosphere, they moved out of their spaceships, pitched their tents, and hung their cooking pots over open fires. Within the ships they lived in a furor of children and dogs.

The latter aroused great interest beneath the bald plate of K. C. Carter, owner of the Galactic Circus. It was K. C.'s boast that his institution included every form of animal life in the Galaxy. Until recently that had been true; then Digger, a rank monstrosity of halitosis and mangy skin, had succumbed to his age, and K. C. no longer had a dog.

K. C. had originally intended to have Digger's hide stuffed and displayed in the extinct animal section. But to his chagrin, he had learned that Digger was not one of the last of the canine race. Besides the dog belonging to the rival institution, Potterby's Zoo, "they" had them — the bilking Gypsies! He hadn't the faintest knowledge as to the Romanies' whereabouts, but if there was an available dog in the Galaxy, it belonged to K. C. Carter.

He pounded his buzzer, and a slinky female answered the summons.

"Pauline! Where's Casino?"

"Catching snakes on Venus."

"To Hell with snakes! I need a dog! Tell Casino to get his tail back here!"

"Yes sir!"

Pauline smoothed her hips in place and returned to the outer office. There was nothing she preferred to having Fran Casino return to Earth.

Within a week the trapper was striding into the office. He was a tall, heavily constructed man with a vividly tanned skin, black hair and brown eyes. He wore leather sandals, flapping blue slacks, a bare chest, and a necklace consisting of a sixteen foot, purple snake. In Pauline's refined opinion, there was something about him that was not quite civilized.

She withdrew to a safe distance and pointed an accusing finger at the colorful reptile.

"What's the purpose of that?"

"My friend, Koko. He guards me against impulsive females. Everytime I return from a trip, you try to knock me down and splatter that bug juice you call lipstick all over me. This time I'm prepared."

"I thought you liked me!"

"Occasionally, but not all the time."

Without knocking, Fran entered K. C.'s sanctum.

"Hello." He helped himself to one of K. C.'s imported cigarettes.

"Hello, yourself. Why don't you wear a shirt? Can't you decorate yourself with something more unusual than a Purple Burdoose? We've got five of those."

"If I wear a shirt, Koko crawls under it. He gets warm and starts exploring. When Koko explores, he tickles. I am allergic to being tickled. I prefer Koko because he is pretty and doesn't bite. Also you'll not take him away from me and put him in the snakehouse. I caught a Silver Cucari, and you owe me five thousand credits. Why did you recall me? I was on the trail of a Mutar."

"We have a Mutar. What we don't have is a dog. Digger cashed in his chips."

"For the last two years the odor of putrification in the vicinity of Digger's cage led me to the conclusion that he was already dead."

"We need a dog."

"A pity, since, with exception of Potterby's, there are none." Fran collected another cigarette.

That's where you're wrong. The Gypsies have them."

"Gypsies? They began living in apartments and sending their offspring to kindergarten years ago. It was a defensive measure against the infiltration of the Ryes. I should know. My grandfather married one. She was fat and rich, and my grandfather appreciated both qualities."

"Fine, but I'm not interested in your geneology. The other day I had lunch with General Revere. He was worrying about the antics of a Gypsy caravan that was on a rampage in the Galaxy. He said they had dogs!"

"The only dog Revere ever saw was Digger. If the Gypsy beasts are similar to him, we don't want 'em. It would cost a small fortune in chlorophyll to keep the air around the Circus breathable." Fran scratched Koko's back, and the snake twiched luxuriously.

"Since when do you pay the Circus' overhead? You get me a dog, Casino!"

Fran sighed. "Where are the Gypsies these days?"

K. C. shrugged. "Somewhere in the Galaxy. Try Kemlin in Orion. Revere told me they'd raised hell there. Maybe you can pick up the trail. Don't Gypsies usually mark it—little, crossed sticks, or something?"

"If you're referring to a patteran, I greatly doubt that I shall find 'little, crossed sticks' along the spaceways. I have a feeling that

this job is similar to the one where I was sent to Rigel IV to capture the only extant Tundee Beetle."

"So what? You caught it."

"Luck, I assure you. It's fond of human beings. While I was trying to sleep one night, it crawled up and bit me. You have no idea how close the Galaxy came to losing its only Tundee Beetle!"

"I admire your self-control."

"Thank you. May I have my five thousand credits?"

"Do I owe you five housand credits?"

"If you want a Silver Cucari, you do."

K. C. pondered. "I have one."

"But it's a male. This one is a female. Together, they will create oodles of Silver Cucaris."

"Still—"

"Come, Koko." Fran slid off the desk. "We'll go work for Potterby's Zoo."

"Now, wait a minute, Casino! A man can bargain, can't he?"

"Sure. Which reminds me—that dog's going to cost you plenty, K. C. I should think about ten thousand would be cheap on my part."

"You're crazy! I'll give you six."

"For six I should bother?"

"All right, seven!"

Considering your poverty, I'll take nine."

"Eight, and I'm not saying another word!"

"All right, you miser. Now give me that five."

"Did I agree to five?"

"In a voice loud enough to be heard on Venus!"

K. C. pulled out his checkbook. You're a hard man, Casino."

"You're no weakling yourself." Warm ashes from Fran's cigarette fell on Koko, who wriggled with pleasure.

"Are you taking me to lunch, Fran?" Pauline queried when he left K. C.'s office.

"Why should I? Are you trying to save money by beguiling me into feeding you?"

"Certainly not! I have plenty of money!"

"Then you can take me and Koko to lunch."

"I'll take you, but not Koko."

Fran shook his head. "Love me, love my snake." He walked on.

"Where are you going?"

"To Kemlin in Orion."

K. C. wandered out of his office. "My dear Pauline, if Casino is being ungallant, I will take you to lunch."

"How very sweet of you, Mr. Carter. I'd be delighted."

She glanced venomously at Fran, who emitted a peal of laughter that made the building quiver.

Fran went to a nearby restaurant where his eccentricities were known and ordered a steak for himself

and a salad for Koko, who was a strict vegetarian. During the meal he consulted an astronomical chart and selected a route that would grant him convenient stopovers on the way to Kemlin. After lunch he busied himself supplying his ship and in a few days was ready for the blastoff.

"General Revere!" the Commandant of the Galactic Control Forces barked. "What in hell have you been doing? Taking a vacation?"

"Now, George," Augustus Revere spread placid hands in a calming gesture, "remember your blood pressure."

"Damn my blood pressure! The Council has been ripping me all morning—all because of those unspeakable Gypsies you were supposed to take care of!"

"I did! I told the Gypsy King that if his people didn't behave, I'd take away every spaceman's license in the outfit. He was extremely affable and promised they'd behave."

"Do you call this behaving? Listen to these complaints!" The Commandant pulled a sheaf of distinctly official documents from beneath a paperweight on his desk.

"The Rabs report that one of their members was chased and finally driven to take refuge in a hole in the ground by one of the canines that form a part of every Gypsy entourage."

"Now why should one of those nice doggies chase a Rab?" Revere wondered. "The Rabs are peaceful, I might even say, timid citizens."

"Who happen to resemble a Terran rodent. Centuries ago, when dogs were plentiful, they were trained to kill rodents. As a matter of fact, they liked to."

"Then there's a simple explanation for the incident."

"Listen to the next one! On Belden, where the intelligent life assumes the form of a glowworm, the Gypsy children stuffed a glass receptacle with Beldens, covered it, and used it as a toy. Had the children not dropped the jar, nearly fifty citizens of Belden would have suffocated. As it is, they've got claustrophobia."

"Well, you know how children are."

The Commandant's voice was pure acid. "On Kao, adult Gypsies kidnapped a citizen, chained him to a post, and by means of sundry indignities, taught him to dance."

"Let's see now, Kaos—"

"Look like bears. But that isn't all. Ever since the Gypsies began their reign of terror, we've received complaints of pilfering, fraud, kidnapping, and so on. They stole nearly a hundred Rhode Island

Reds from Professor Buck's experimental station on Ceres. How would you feel if you'd spent your life mutating chickens to the point where they were fairly intelligent and have someone steal them? The Professor smelled them barbecuing and went insane! Rufus Godolphin, son of James Godolphin, the millionaire, was convinced that his planet, Nira, was magical. As a result he was rooked out of nearly twenty thousand credits."

"Godolphin's a rather stupid chap," Revere said reminescently. "I beat him at chess once."

The Commandant glowered, but he managed to control himself.

"Even if the Gypsies weren't responsible for these outrages, they'd still constitute a problem. Throughout the Galaxy, the Council has been trying to achieve a uniform civilization, which necessitates a scientific people. So what happens?" he bellowed. "A planetary representative of the Council beats his brains out and develops ulcers in an effort to cleanse the citizens' minds of retrogressive superstitions. The Gypsies come along with their card tricks, their palmistry, their squealing violins, their dogs, cats, rats—and the society tags after them as if they were the Pied Piper of Hamlin. The representative blasts himself—and don't laugh—it's happened!"

"Well," Revere brushed his eyes, "well, well."

"Stop muttering to yourself, you lump of senility! The Council says to stop 'em! So how are we going to do it?"

"I don't know."

"Then it's a good thing I do! I tossed the problem into the lap of Cultural Administration, All you have to do is lead those Gypsies, by the necks if need be, to Gallipago, which, in case you don't know, is Procyon's second planet."

"Why Gallipago?"

"You'll find out!"

When the Gypsies discovered what awaited them on Gallipago, they literally sat down and bawled.

The planet was as barren as an asteroid. The only thing it had was gravity, but there was plenty of that. Rising from the boulder strewn surface was a splendid dome, which sheltered a small city of cottages, shops, public buildings, and even a park. A delicious mixture of air wafted through the city; flowers grew; at specified times, rain fell.

It was a charming model of ideal living conditions, but the Gypsies wept, for their ships were being confiscated. Except for occasional supply vessels, they were being marooned on Gallipago. The proceedings were highly legal, since, possessing no permanent residence

and having paid no taxes, the Gypsies were accused of vagabondage.

They watched with suffering countenances as Revere and his men departed. Huddled on one of the cobbled streets, their bright garments a jarring note among the pastel surroundings, the Gypsies resembled lost children. Even the dogs flopped dejectedly, noses between their paws.

Constanza Serano riffled a greasy deck of cards. "I guess I won't be needing these," she moaned. She shifted her ponderous weight, and the strings of beads she wore clicked lugubriously.

"Nor shall I need my violin." Piero Gugli twanged a mournful note.

Georgi Manasa, King of the tribe, heaved himself to his feet. "We—we must not be downhearted," he declared with false cheerfulness. "The wind sometimes blows coldly. Let us prepare our homes and start the fires."

Thus encouraged, the women struggled to their heaped belongings which had been removed from the ships and carried into the city. Scorning the cottages, the Gypsies pitched tents in the park and filled them with cushions and robes. The joy they might have felt at raiding the food lockers was mitigated by the knowledge that the frozen chickens and pigs belonged to them. A good round of buckshot, if it had still exisited, would have cheered them immensely.

The men remained in the street and listened to Georgi's words of encouragement. Aroused from their gloom, the children vanished into the city's interior to be recalled only by the odors of the cooking pots. They intended a full campaign of vandalism. Having nothing else to chase, the dogs yelped after them.

Danila Manasa finished preparing the tent she shared with her father, threw a hodge-podge of edibles into a kettle, added a silver piece for luck, and hung the pot above a low-burning fire. She sat down, crosing her legs beneath her long skirt, and considered the glass heel of her pink slipper.

A simulated night began to shroud the city and throw the fires into relief. Danila's dusky face gleamed ruddily in the light of the flames and her heavy earrings glittered.

Georgi pushed through the shadows and lowered himself to the ground near her. He crammed an evil smelling mixture of tabacco into a clay pipe and clamped it between yellow teeth. Dutifully Danila lighted a splinter in the fire and held it to the pipe. Georgi's cheeks became concave as he sucked, but eventually the air was tainted with

a weedy smoke.

Danila wrapped small pats of dough in leaves she plucked from an overhead tree and thrust the envelopes among the dying coals. When the bread was baked, she used a green twig to remove it. She set the kettle, containing its homogenous mess, near Georgi and withdrew to the tent while he ate.

"Danila! I'm finished!" he called after awhile.

As she began her meal, he uncorked a bottle of wine.

"This is a sad day," he murmured.

"Yes, Papa."

"I have thought a great deal, and I find no door through which we may return to our freedom."

Danila wiped her fingers on the grass.

"Perhaps when the supply ship comes, we could steal it."

Georgi shook his head. "One would not be enough for us. Besides, a ship will not come for a year. We'll be dead by that time."

Danila bowed her head beneath the solemn threat. Georgi was right, for if Gypsies were forced to abandon the trail of the patteran, they died of heartbreak. If they voluntarily chose the life of the Rye, they could be happy, but otherwise, they were miserable. She rubbed the chocolate ears of her dachshund, which had crept close to her as if fearful of this strange, silent place.

"Gretal is going to have puppies." Danila stroked the dog's abdomen with knowing fingers.

"Ah!" Georgi sipped his wine. "That is interesting. I congratulate her. Motherhood is a fine thing." A tear slid down his cheek. "I shall never have any grandchildren!"

"Papa!" Danila patted his hand. "We'll get away from this place. Don't worry. And I shall find a young man—much better than Fedo."

"A cad!"

"Don't blame him for loving Susi more than me, Papa. She's a plump girl, and I'm thin."

"You should eat more."

"I like being thin." She girdled her waist with her hands. "I feel so free! I dance much better, too. When Susi dances, she shakes too much."

"You could mate with Toni."

"Bah! Toni is a sapling. I want a tree—a big, strong man."

"There are none here."

"He will come. Constanza read my cards and saw him there. He is in my hand, too. These things do not lie."

"Perhaps Fedo is meant."

"Besides Fedo another is shown. Fedo was marked with an island, but the other's symbol is a pyramid."

Georgi nodded with satisfaction. "Possibly, we will escape."

They were silent as the darkness beseiged the dying embers of the fire. A communion of warmth extended between the old man, the girl, and the dog.

It took Fran several weeks to trace the Gypsies to Gallipago.

"By damn," he swore as the ship settled near the dome, "they'd better be here!"

Koko was stretched on top of the instrument panel. The mechanisms exuded a warmth that was immensely satisfying to the purple snake. It emitted a keening noise, comparable to the purring of a cat.

Fran caressed its back with a large, brown hand.

"You want to come along, old fellow? I suppose you may as well."

Before putting on his helmet, Fran coiled the snake around his head in the semblance of a turban. Accustomed to this position, Koko refrained from wiggling and made no effort to slither across the faceplate. He had tried it once and been properly pinched by Fran's teeth.

Fran walked to the gate of the domed city and signalled for admission. It opened immediately, and he stepped into a group of dusky, gayly dressed people who exhibited expressions of intense suffering. Fran removed his helmet, and the people, observing Koko, scattered.

A crescendo of furious barking hailed the arrival of a squad of dogs. Having always considered them as ferocious animals, Fran drew his blaster and held it in readiness for any attack. From a safe distance the Gypsies watched, their woes forgotten in this new excitement.

A girl ran into the street.

"Get away, you fool!" Fran exhorted. "These dogs are killers!"

He shuddered as the girl was surrounded by the howling pack. He tried to maneuver a shot, but he was afraid of hitting her. The dogs leaped towards her, catching at her skirt and sleeves.

"Down, Tonzil! Behave yourself. Bruta! Down!"

To Fran's astonishment, the dogs dropped to their haunches and ceased their medley. Quivering pink tongues flowed between white teeth. He had the momentary impression that he was being laughed at. Feeling somewhat foolish, he lowered his blaster.

"Put it away," the girl ordered. "The dogs are harmless."

He holstered the gun and diffidently approached her and the circle of wary dogs. She backed away, and Fran, remembering Koko still riding on his head, smiled and

lowered the snake to his arm, which it circled like a purple corkscrew.

"My pet is harmless, too," Fran said.

"It doesn't look it!"

"Neither do your dogs."

She smiled faintly. "I'm Danila, daughter of King Georgi."

"How do you do? I'm Fran Casino. I've come to buy a dog."

"A dog?"

She looked at the other Gypsies and shouted in Romany. They began a whispering campaign, occasionally regarding Fran with sly eyes.

"You'd better talk with my father," Danila said. "Come along. We're camped in the park."

"The park! But why?" Fran looked at the silent, cottage-lined streets. "You have all of these houses."

"Houses!" They were crossing a miniature bridge, and she stopped to spit three times in the water for luck. "Who wants to live in houses?"

Fran, who regarded the ritual with interest, laughed. "Lots of people live in houses."

"They're unhealthy, puny creatures because of it, too. I was in a house once. The air was stale, and I felt the walls would crush me. It was a tomb. There were even flowers in it—poor things! People who live in houses never go anyplace. I like to go places."

"I live in a house; I go places."

She regarded him with interest. "Where do you go?"

"I came here, for instance, although my house is on Earth. Before I came here, I was on Venus; before that, one of Rigel's planets. I've traveled as far as Lostland. Of course, while I'm on these places, I either camp in the ship or pitch a tent, depending on the planet's atmosphere."

Danila clapped her hands joyfully. "You're just like a Gypsy; and you're big and strong—a tree!" She caught the arm unoccupied by Koko with an air of possession.

He looked at her askance. A comely wench, he thought, with her dusky skin and raven tresses bouncing to her hips. He liked long hair on a woman, even if it did have an aggrevating habit of getting in a man's way—a good body, too, full; yet slender. She had a jaunty method of locomotion that made her appear to be dancing always to a naughty melody.

She reached across him and touched Koko with a tentative finger.

"You like animals, don't you?"

"Sure. They're my job. I work for K. C. Carter's Galactic Circus."

She dropped his arm. "You mean you catch animals and put them in cages!"

"That's right."

"If we sold you a dog, would you put it in a cage?"

"Certainly. Even though your dogs appear tame, the people who visit the Circus don't know it. They'd be scared stiff if the animals were on the loose. Dogs have a rather vicious history, you know. When they were plentiful, they'd as soon bite a man as look at him."

"I don't think we'll sell you a dog," she said coldly.

"Why not?"

"No Gypsy wants his dog put in a cage. There's an ancient saying that a man's best friend is his dog. It's true!"

"Look, honey, just because you Gypsies have managed to tame a few hounds doesn't grant them that concession. They're brutes as far as the rest of the Galaxy is concerned. Dogs are nearly extinct these days because they raised so much hell on Earth, the Terrans had to kill 'em."

"If you'd been kind to them—"

"Sure. I can see myself being kind to a dog! Here, doggie! Nice doggie!" He made patting motions with his hand and jumped about three feet when Gretal, heavy with young, slunk from beneath a bush and wagged her pudgy tail.

"That's an odd one," Fran remarked.

"Gretal is a dachshund, a very ancient breed."

"It's awfully fat."

"She's going to have babies. Oo's gonna be a wittle mommums, isn't oo?" Danila crooned.

Fran's eyes were speculative. "How about letting me have it?"

"I should say not! Put my Gretal in a cage? Look at her. Does she look ferocious?"

Fran inspected the long snout, bristling with curling, black whiskers and tipped with a damp, soft nose, the languishing, black eyes; the velvety, chocolate ears.

"No," he conceded. "It looks somehow lost—and lonely."

Danila smiled. "Dachsies always look that way. They're sensitive. If you don't treat them well, you can break their hearts. You can pet her, if you want to."

Fran removed his gloves and laid a hand against the sleek fur. He could feel an inward, timid quivering.

"I suppose Gretal's an exception."

"No, she isn't. All dogs are like Gretal. Oh, they have different personalities. But they're all loyal. They'd die to protect their owners. Should their masters die, they mourn for them at the graveside."

They had arrived at Georgi's tent, and Fran observed a gray-headed man squatting between the

flaps. A spume of odoriferous smoke coiled from his pipe.

"Papa," Danila said in respectful tones, "this is the man from the ship. He wishes to buy a dog for a circus, and he intends to put it in a cage. He believes all dogs are wild, but he likes Gretal."

Georgi withdrew his pipe from his mouth. "You should not carry Gretal you might injure the pups. Put her down."

"Yes, Papa." Danila laid the dog gently on a cushion. "I was careful."

"Bring some wine. We will talk. Sit down, Rye." He gestured to a patch of grass. "You'd better remove that suit. You have a fine snake. Once I had a snake, but it was black."

Fran deposited Koko on the grass, where he twitched indignantly, not liking the coolness of the ground. Some instinct led him to the warm ashes of the fire, where he coiled himself in a contented coronet. The reptile began to purr much to the astonishment of Danila and Georgi. Gretal trembled and waddled into the tent, where she buried her sleek head beneath a pillow. It was enough strain on her meek courage to observe a snake on the premises, but when the snake sounded like a cat, that was going too far.

"It sings!" Danila cried.

Extraordinary!" Georgi recovered his composure with an effort.

"It's a Purple Burdoose," Fran explained. "They're native to Venus and have some rather odd talents. When they're young, they're inclined to be mischievous, but Koko, who's about three hundred now, has attained the age of reason. He's quite lazy, too. Put him in a warm place, and he'll stay there forever, or, at least until he's hungry. Of course, if he figures there's a warmer place in the vicinity, he'll move on. If he's too warm, he gets frisky. Every night I put him in his basket, and every night he crawls in with me. It didn't matter until he figured out the switches on the electric blanket I was using. I woke up one night with the certain idea that I had been transported to Mercury. The blanket was going full blast, and Koko was romping all over the place. Since then I've used a ragged quilt I swiped from a museum."

Danila giggled. "I'd like a snake like that."

Georgi frowned at her and, remembering that she had no business intruding on a male conversation, she went into the tent and began to comfort Gretal.

"You wish to buy a dog for your circus?" Georgi queried. "I'm afraid your trip is futile. We could hardly sell one into slavery."

"It isn't slavery. They're simply put on exhibition."

"What could be worse for a sensitive animal?"

"But Purple Burdeese are more intelligent than dogs. They don't mind. We have five of them in the snakehouse," Fran argued.

"But, as you've pointed out, they're different. Give them a place of warmth and they're happy. Feed them and they require no companionship. A dog is not like that. It's an animal requiring love and security. Otherwise, it's miserable."

"Are you trying to tell me that those brutes which plagued Earth needed love and security?"

"Why did they become wild? In olden times man and dog were inseparable. They needed each other for mutual protection and companionship. But society changed. Science gave man protection in the form of mechanical gadgets such as roguards; it increased his forms of entertainment; it gave him unusual pets in the form of mutant animals. Dogs were outmoded when children clamored for pet lions and elephants. So eager was he to keep pace with the trends, man overlooked the value of dogs—their loyalty and intelligence. Without masters, dogs became strays. In the cities they were considered a menace and killed. In the country, they reverted to wild things. They needed food for which they killed. Without guidance, all creatures became their enemies, even man. They were hunted. The result was their extinction except for our own, for what is a Gypsy without his dog? He is an unstrung violin."

"So you won't sell me a dog? Not for any price?"

Georgi shrugged. "I suppose there is a price for all things. Man has been known to sell his children. If a man is starving, he will exchange his treasure house for a piece of bread. We Gypsies would give much to leave this place, for to stay here is to die."

"Why? The city's attractive. The air is good. You have food and water and each other."

"But our wings are clipped. The way of a Gypsy is the trail of the patteran. We can no longer follow that trail. The government has confiscated our ships because we paid no taxes. To whom were we to pay taxes?"

"Taxes are paid to your residential planet."

"We had none."

"Unless you have an established residence, you're guilty of vagabondage."

"Even Ryes wander among the planets. You do!"

"At least once in every five years

I must return to Earth, register myself as a citizen, pay my taxes, vote, and fill out a census form. Everyone has to return to their residential planet every five years. It's a law of the Council."

Georgi sighed. "I'm afraid we don't pay much attention to laws. Why should we? We're a peaceful people, and we have our own laws. We've never bothered anyone."

Fran hid a grin. "Let's talk about a price for a dog. I'll pay five hundred credits."

Georgi shook his head. "We wouldn't sell a dog even for a spaceship." He knocked the ashes from his pipe and got to his feet. "All of us wouldn't fit into one ship.

Fran also stood up and put on his spacesuit.

"You're leaving?"

"Not for awhile yet." He grinned. "I don't give up that easy. Besides, I like it here, and I haven't had a vacation in six months. I have to collect my gear from the ship. You won't mind a neighbor, will you?"

"I suppose not."

Koko lifted his head and regarded Fran with inquisitive, yellow eyes.

"It's all right, fellow. I'll be back. Just relax."

Reassured, the snake resumed its somnolent position.

Within the ship Fran sent a message to K. C.: "Case hopeless. The only price they'd take would be a score of spaceships. Love their dogs. I'm going to take a vacation. Charming wench. Your adoring Casino."

He strapped his tent, blankets, and a package of edibles to his back and returned to the encampment.

Next to Georgi's canvas manor, he began to raise his tent. A troupe of sniggering children collected to observe his progress.

"What's the matter?" Fran demanded of them. "Am I doing it wrong, or something? Come on, speak up, or I'll paddle the lot of you!"

The reply was more giggles.

"They don't understand Universal," Danila said from where she was preparing dinner on a new firesite, since Koko refused to move from the old one. "They think it's funny for a man to work. Women always prepare the tents."

"Well, tell them in your gibberish that I don't have a woman."

"They know that." Danila smiled at her stew. "They think that's funny, too. Men always have women to work for them. If not wives, then mothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins. If I were married, I would work for both my husband and my father."

"Suppose you left the tribe?"

"My father would join my aunt's household, or he might marry again. He's fond of Constanza Serano, whose husband died last spring." She sighed. "I'll probably never marry. There's no man here for me, and we'll probably never leave."

Because she knew her fortune to be otherwise, Danila did not believe the pessimism her words implied, but there was no harm in leading a man in the right direction.

"Oh, something will come along," Fran said cheerfully and added the finishing touches to his tent.

He switched on his infra heater and began to cook his dinner. Danila regarded his preparations critically, and Koko, realizing that it was time to eat, slithered to Fran's feet and eyed his master plaintively.

Fran nudged the snake playfully with his foot. "Eat grass, you cow!"

Koko coiled around Fran's leg and by a devious route attained his shoulder.

"Here!" Fran extracted a head of lettuce from his pack and teased the snake with a leaf. Koko darted forward with a motion too swift for the eye to follow and seized the whole head.

"Not the fingers!" Fran begged. "On the ground, ingrate!"

Pauline swayed into K. C.'s office and said mincingly, "A message from Casino, Mr. Carter."

"Reporting success, I hope!" K. C. took the paper. "Thank you, my dear. Uh—lunch as usual, today?"

"I'd love it, Mr. Carter."

"Call me Kenneth, darling. Why should we be formal?"

Half a minute after Pauline had retired, he was exploding. "Spaceships, they want! Twenty of them! A caravel costs a million! That's twenty million credits! They can damn well keep their fleabags!" He hurled Fran's message into the disposal as the buzzer burped.

"What is it?"

"Mr. Potterby's on the screen, sir. Shall I connect you?" the switchboard operator inquired.

"How many times must I tell you I won't demean myself by holding a conservation with that—that keeper of a menagerie?"

"Must we go through this every time Mr. Potterby calls, Mr. Carter? You know very well you're going to talk with him."

"You're fired!"

"I always am when Mr. Potterby calls. Myra, will you take over? I've been fired again. I'll be in the lady's room when the old boy simmers down and rehires me."

"Miss Miller!" K. C. howled. "This is the most impertinent dem-

onstration—"

"This is Miss Howland, Mr. Carter," a new voice informed him. "Will you speak with Mr. Potterby?"

"Oh, hell, I suppose so!"

K. C. hastily smoothed his countenance into an expression of ineffable satisfaction as the videoscreen glowed into life and revealed a man as bald and smug as himself.

"How'r'ya, K. C.?" Potterby asked.

"Just fine, and you, Pot, old boy?"

"The same, the same. Beautiful weather, isn't it?"

"Delightful!"

"I—uh—heard Digger died a few weeks back."

"Really? I don't know who supplies you with your misinformation."

"He isn't dead?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, now, I'm glad to hear that. My dog's doing fine, too. 'Course, he's several years younger than Digger. The crowds find him quite an attraction."

"Ah!"

"You should visit us sometime, K. C. See some real animals for a change."

K. C. glowered. "I doubt that such an incomplete collection would interest me."

"Incomplete? K. C.! You don't mean that!"

"I certainly do! Dog or no dog, mine still has infinitely more attractions than your so-called zoo!"

"Digger is dead!"

"I didn't say that!"

"You don't have to. The truth's all over your face. So long, K. C. If you ever need a loan, you know who to come to."

Potterby's image faded, leaving K. C. in the throes of near apoplexy. He pounded the buzzer.

"What is it, Kenneth?"

"Pauline! Call General Spacecraft. Order twenty caravels to be delivered to Gallipago immediately. By damn, I'm going to have a dog that will make Potterby's look sick!"

Fran lounged in the doorway of his tent and watched Danila dance in the firelight to the music of Piero Gugli's violin. Her skirt whirled excitedly around her long, slender legs, and her blouse trembled in an intriguing fashion. Her hair was a swirling, black whip; her hands moved in graceful, suggestive patterns. The gay, yet haunting, refrain sank deeply into Fran's consciousness. A fine wench, he thought, and lighted a new cigarette.

He applauded when the dance was finished, and Danila sank pantingly against the grass.

She looked up at him happily. "Do you think I dance well?"

"Beautifully."

"Am I too thin?"

"Just right."

"Am I ugly?"

"No."

"I can make a good fishhead stew—if I had fishheads."

"I'm sure."

"Do you like me?"

"Couldn't say." He ground his cigarette into the grass with his thumb.

"Why not?"

"I don't know you."

"Do you want to?"

"I suppose so."

She moved close to him, caught his hand, and laid it against her cheek.

"You're a tree," she said tremulously, "big and strong—"

"Wonderful! I always did want to be a tree."

"I'm a vine—"

"As one vegetable to another—greetings!"

Fran stood up and, drawing Danila to her feet, led her away from the firelighted circle into the cool parkland, where an artificial moon threw leafy shadows against the ground.

Georgi watched them go with a thoughtful mien. Piero raised an eyebrow and twanged a questioning note.

"It is against the law," Georgi intoned.

"So it is."

"He has not offered a price for her."

"Perhaps he does not know our ways. You should speak to him."

Georgi grinned. "He'll pay more when he's properly hooked."

In the forest Danila withdrew reluctantly from Fran's embrace.

"You brute!" she sighed happily. "You great, big, wonderful brute!"

"Ships!" The Gypsies ran towards the city gate as a fleet of twenty-one caravels landed near the dome.

A snappy, little man in a spacesuit emblazoned with the slogan, "Don't use a raft; get General Spacecraft," entered the city.

"I'm looking for a Mr. Casino," he notified the crowd, and Fran edged his way to the front of the ranks.

"I'm Fran Casino."

"Will you sign this please. We have a consignment of twenty caravels for you. Mr. Carter ordered them delivered here."

"Oh, no!" Fran doubted the sanity of both himself and his employer. "Twenty caravels! Me and my sense of humor. I was only joking. Take 'em back!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but our orders were to deliver them to you. We

can't take them back."

Fran tugged on his suit and dashed to his own ship. A message lay in the receiver. He thrust it into the decoder and read: "Sending ships. Make best deal possible. I hate you. K. C."

Returning to the city, Fran removed his helmet. "All right," he said to the G. S. representative. "I'll sign for them!"

Within an hour the G. S. men entered the twenty-first ship and departed. Fran regarded the caravels' shining hulls gloomily.

"They're beautiful!" Georgi joined him, a rapt expression on his face.

"You know why they're here?" Fran told him in a few words.

Georgi frowned. "I didn't say I'd sell you a dog for even twenty spaceships."

"I know it! I know it! No sane man would exchange twenty caravels for a dog either. But, then, who would call K. C. sane?"

"But you would do business on that basis, if we agreed?"

"I wouldn't be too sure about that. To offer one dog for twenty spaceships is robbery. Besides, suppose you had the ships, you'd just get yourselves shoved back here by the Council, and I'd wind up in jail for obstructing justice. So would K. C. for supplying the damn things. I can't let that happen. After all, sane or not, he is my bread and butter."

"It's true — a problem is involved."

"There must be a way to keep both you and K. C. happy." Fran tortured his gray matter. "I've got it! The council gave you this planet. It's all yours—no strings attached. It's your permanent residence—see? All you have to do is elect a government—"

"We have a government," Georgi interrupted haughtily. "I'm the King!"

"That's right. I forgot. So you've got your government; you have got your laws. Describe your society to the Council. Enter a list of all the citizens of Gallipago. After that, all you have to do is return here every five years and send in a report to the Council, pay your taxes, et cetera. That way you can't be accused of vagabondage, and, if you behave yourselves, the Council won't bother you."

"I like that." Georgi scrubbed his chin with his hands. "We'll pay taxes to ourselves."

"We should make lots of money."

"I'm sure you will," Fran agreed. "Just don't forget that ten percent of the haul goes to the Council."

"Now that these matters are settled, will you exchange the ships for a dog?"

"I don't know. It depends on the dog. I might do it for Gretal."

"A sharp bargain, since Gretal's with young."

"Call it what you will. I've decided. Either I get Gretal, or you don't get the ships."

Georgi mused. "Come to the tent. We'll have some wine and talk it over. Gretal belongs to Danila."

"No!" Danila stamped her pink-shod foot. "Gretal's not going to be put in a cage! She would die of humiliation and she would mourn for me."

Out of patience, Fran suggested, "You could come along and stay in the cage with her. We could label it, 'Gypsy and Dog'!" He got to his feet. "I see there can be no transaction. I'll inform my boss to come and get his property."

"If that's the way you feel," Danila told him, "you can take your old snake out of my fireplace! I'm tired of building a fire in a new place everyday!"

"If you had any sense, you'd rotate!" Fran dragged Koko from the ashes and brushed him off, while the snake writhed indignantly. "That's the trouble with you Gypsies," he continued. "You aren't practical! You think more of your dog than you do of your father or your people or anything. They can die just so long as you have your hound!"

Danila's face was troubled. "Is he right, Papa? Is there no other way for us to be free?"

"Yes, and no."

"You may have Gretal," Danila said and collapsed in tears. "My poor doggie! They're gonna put you in a cage!"

"I'll see that she has a cage of one-way glass," Fran promised.

"What's that?"

"It's a kind that lets people look in and see the animal, but the animal can't see out. The glass is soundproof and smellproof. No animal's aware of being watched. Besides, the cage will be comfortable. I'll duplicate Gretal's environment as nearly as I can."

"I don't care. Without me, Gretal will die. You think you're being clever, but you'll see. Oh, Fran, why worry about a dog? Forget about your job and come with us!"

"Unless K. C. gets a dog, we'd be stealing the ships," Fran said gently.

"So? What's wrong with stealing?"

"A lot, honey. I wouldn't really expect you to understand. But, believe me, everything will be done to insure Gretal's happiness. Keep her until you're ready to leave. I won't take her until then."

Georgi patted his daughter's

head. "You have done a fine thing, Danila."

"Thank you, Papa."

"Were it possible, we would take the ships and Gretal, too, but I fear the long arm of the Council."

"Even if there were nothing to fear, I couldn't do it. Fran's a good Rye. He wouldn't take Gretal unless he had to."

Strolling through the empty city, Fran felt wretched. But, dammit, K. C. wasn't a bad, old fellow, and twenty million credits entitled him to something. When Gretal had her pups, he'd never have to worry about a dog again. Fran discounted Danila's threats that the dog would die. Sure, Gretal would miss the girl; so would he, but they'd survive. He returned to his tent and went to sleep.

It rained that night, and he awakened to a cool, clean morning. Dreading an encounter with Danila, he remained for awhile between his blankets. Gradually he became conscious of a change in the general atmosphere. It was too quiet. Koko rustled against the coverings and snuggled closer to him. Fran pushed the snake aside and crawled out of bed. He peered through the tent flap. The park was bare; not a tent remained; not a cooking pot.

Fran ran to the city wall and looked outside. Only his ship remained. The Gypsies had packed and gone. In their anxiety to return to the spaceways, they had disregarded the rain. Gretal! Fran clenched his fists. Had they taken Gretal, too?

A happy yelp somewhere in the shrubbery reassured him.

"Gretal!" He knelt on the ground and clapped his hands. "Here, doggie! Nice doggie!"

Resembling an overladen vessel, the dachshund waddled into view and condescended to touch his hand with her pink tongue.

"Nice girl!" Fran stroked her fur. "We'll get along fine, won't we?"

Something agitated the bushes behind Gretal, and Fran found himself staring at two pink shoes.

"What the deuce are you doing here?"

"You said I could come and live in the cage with Gretal," Danila replied.

"I was joking. You can't!"

"That's what I thought, so I decided to persuade you to give only Gretal's pups to this K. C. man. Since they won't know any better, they won't mind a cage."

"What about Gretal?"

"I'll keep her."

"I think maybe I'll keep her myself as a souvenir."

"Oh, Fran, don't be mean! Can't I stay with Gretal, even though she belongs to you? I wouldn't

mind going from one planet to another and looking for animals."

Fran sat back on his heels and extracted a cigarette from his pocket.

"What does your father think of this?"

She pulled a match from her skirt, struck it against a stone, and kneeling beside him, applied it to his cigarette, while her free arm stole insidiously around his neck.

"Papa says it's all right as long as we return to Gallipago every five years so he can see his grandchildren."

Fran tried to look properly angry but with her soft lips nearly brushing his cheek, he could only toss the cigarette away and yield to the inevitable.

THE END

"Well, well . . . . the Moebius strip theory does make sense at that . . . . . "

Illustrated by Malcolm H. Smith

MCMLV

By Wilson Tucker

When you have a door bell that goes *ting ting thunk* instead of ringing properly, you get accustomed to unusual visitors. At least, it seemed to Henry Mason that since his doorbell had taken to misbehaving his visitors had been anything but run of the mill.

THE doorbell chimed its familiar one-two-three pattern, a tinkling *ting-ting-thunk*. Henry frowned at the unfinished sentence in the typewriter and twisted around to stare through the window at the street. People were always annoying him with that broken-step *ting-ting-thunk;* perhaps if he had the *thunk* fixed they would stop ringing his bell. He leaned a precarious distance from the edge of the chair, trying to peer around the edge of the window. He saw only a car parked out in front.

Resigned to the temporary defeat, Henry got up from the desk chair and padded into the adjoining room and to the front door. As he walked he buttoned the sleeves of his shirt and tried to smooth down his hair. It might be a woman waiting on the other side of the door—only last week a charming young miss had stood there, selling pots and pans. He turned the knob and yanked it open.

Two dull-looking gentlemen.

"Mr. Carew?" the nearest gentleman asked politely. "Cary Carew?"

A pleased expression settled on Henry's face. "That's my pen name," he replied pleasantly.

"Ah, yes. Henry Mason, is it not?"

"That's me."

"I know you must be a busy man, Mr. Mason, but may we have a few moments with you? My name is Groves."

Henry Mason raised his eyebrows. "What is it?"

Groves deftly reached into an inner pocket and brought out his wallet. Flipping it open with one hand, he held up and exhibited the silver shield pinned inside it. "F. B. I." he said politely. "I also have credentials."

"Now, look," Henry burst out—"I can account for every penny! I always keep my receipts and records and every penny spent was a legitimate expense. I can show you—"

"No, no," Groves said, still politely. "F. B. I., Mr. Mason. I'm not with Treasury."

Mason blinked at him. "Oh."

"May we come in? Your neighbors will be watching." He smiled a vacant little smile that meant nothing.

Henry admitted the two of them, the polite F. B. I. agent and his companion who said nothing and did nothing. He led the way into his writing room because there was an easy chair there and the room was the most comfortable in the house. The room was lined with book shelves and filing cabinets and stacks of typing paper, tools of the writer's trade. He invited the

agent to take the easy chair, brought in another for the second man, and sat him down beside the desk to lean warily on the typewriter. Henry said, "My neighbors are always watching me. They think I'm eccentric."

"Indeed?" Still the politeness.

"Camouflage." Henry waved a casual hand. "It lends an aura of glamor and mystery to my activities and sometimes increases the sale of my books. Besides—it keeps them away from me. Always nosing around."

"I see." The agent studied the writer.

Without speaking, Henry held out his hand to him. The agent stared at the open palm and then as if guessing his thoughts, brought out the wallet a second time, opened it, and placed it in Henry's hand. Henry brought it close to his eyes to read the identify card. He read the agent's brief description, looked at the name, carefully examined the small photograph and then peered up at the man, comparing the photograph to the face. Yes—unless the whole thing was a forgery, this was actually Arthur Groves of the F. B. I. Henry laid his open palm across the silver badge to get the feel of it. He saw the agent watching him.

"Testing it," Henry explained. "I once wrote a story in which my protagonist discovered a government agent was an imposter, by feeling the badge. A silver badge imparts a certain cool sense to the touch, where another metal will not."

"I see. And are you satisfied?"

"Yeah, I guess so; you're F. B. I. all right. And this isn't about my taxes, eh?"

"No indeed, but another matter entirely. Mr. Mason, we have been reading some of your most recent stories."

Cary Carew beamed. "Did you like them?"

"I'm afraid I'm not a competent judge," the agent told him. "It isn't their merit that we are interested in, Mr. Mason, but their content. Some of your newer stories have chronicled the adventures of a government secret agent, and their content has been. . . ah, interesting to the extreme."

Cary Carew fixed the agent with a cold and beady eye. "Thought-police!" he snapped.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, thought-police. You're going to tell me what to think and what to write! I knew the government would come to this!"

Groves frowned ever so slightly. "But that isn't true at all, Mr. Mason. I have no intention of telling you what to write. My

only purpose here is to inquire into the content of some stories you've already written and published."

Henry stared at the man for a long moment or two, his memory rushing back over the more recent tales that had appeared in print. "Aha!" he said suddenly. "I see."

What, may I ask?"

"Why you are here. Crimethink!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Crimethink. The crime of having thoughts not in sympathy with those currently in Washington." The writer's manner was an odd mixture of frightened Mason and defiant Carew. Very well—if he was being sent to The Rock he would go with head high. "I sometimes manage to include a bit of my personal philosophy in my fiction. And now Washington has discovered that and descends upon me like a cloud of locusts." He looked around at the second man and thought to correct himself. "Two locusts."

Groves stared across the room at his silent companion. The companion broke his silence. "Eccentric," he muttered.

Groves shook his head and patiently began again. "Mr. Mason, you persist in misunderstanding me. I am not interested in your thoughts or your philosophy. I am interested only in certain phases of your stories dealing with this government secret agent, this fellow — What is his name?"

"Dan Devlin," Cary Carew supplied promptly.

"Yes, Dan Devlin. This Mr. Devlin is a remarkable fellow. I might say he has seen more action in his brief career than I have in my entire life with the Bureau."

"Thank you."

"To get to the point of the matter, Mr. Mason, this Dan Devlin chap knows a little more about governmental secrets than we do ourselves."

"Oh?"

"Yes. For instance in one recent story, you have him thwart an enemy spy who is intent on stealing plans for the atomic bomb. As I recall, he does succeed in trapping and capturing the spy and in recovering the stolen documents. But Mr. Mason, you then proceed to reveal the contents of those documents by causing your hero to read them, thus allowing the readers to learn them. The documents are read off in detail. You point out that twenty-two point seven pounds of U-235 are necessary to critical mass, you describe the materials of which the

bomb casing is made, you draw a verbal picture of the triggering device which causes the bomb to explode, and you then show the exact amount of damage that bomb will do to a given area."

"Of course," Cary Carew said happily. He waved to the well-filled bookshelves about him. "I always do research."

"That isn't public knowledge," the agent said. "Or wasn't, until you wrote it." He seemed bitter.

"Well-documented research always lends an aura of authenticity," Carew proudly explained.

"Perhaps you didn't understand me. I said, that wasn't public knowledge. It was classified."

Henry stared at him. "What was classified?"

"The entire data concerning the bomb which you published in the story."

"Nonsense," the writer said.

The second man leaned forward in his chair to fix Mason with a probing glare. "It isn't nonsense. How do you explain it?"

"Who are you?" Henry demanded.

"Clark," the other snapped. "C. I. C."

"What's that?"

"You should know," Clark retorted with a suggestion of wryness. "Your Devlin character works for us."

"Oh, you mean *that*. The Counter-Intelligence Corps. Say, I'll bet you guys really get around. Do you like to read my stories?"

"We've been reading them—closely. What about it?"

"What about what?"

"Where did you get the classified material on the atomic bomb you published?"

"Research, I told you."

"Research my eye! That hasn't been published."

Henry sat up triumphantly. "I've got you! It has."

"Has not."

"Has." He pointed dramatically. "Right there." His triumphant finger indicated an encyclopedia set. The set was his pride and joy, a veritable gold mine of information on every subject under the sun. Time and again it had come to his rescue to provide an authentic background, a tropical setting, a concise history or a hidden date or fact. That particular encyclopedia set had repaid him many times its cost by giving him the material to fabricate many stories.

The C. I. C. operative glanced at the set only long enough to identify it. "You'd better have a good alibi."

Cary Carew gave him a scornful glance. "I don't understand how you made the Corps. You

can't come to a rational conclusion until you've examined the evidence. Dan Devlin lives by that rule."

"Just between you and me, buddy, Dan Derlin hasn't got long to live. *Where* did you get the classified data?"

"There!" Henry almost shrieked.

"Oh, take a look and let's get on with it," Groves interposed. He had lost a modicum of his politeness. "We want to find out about that rocket material, as well."

Cary Carew brightened "Oh yes, my White Sands story. One of my better ones, really. The enemy spy gave Devlin a real chase for his money in that one."

Groves said wearily, "Between the enemy spy and Dan Devlin, several cats were let out of the bag in that one. Where did you obtain the classified information on the fuel mixture used to fire the rocket, and where did you gain the data on the height it reached and the meteorological matter it obtained while up there, and how did you learn of the alloy and construction methods used in the rocket? How did you know the exact date it was fired and how long it was aloft, and where it fell and how much of it was recovered?"

A casual Carew pointed to the encyclopedia set, his expression revealing his opinion of real government agents.

Clark was fingering the pages of the first volume, leafing toward the section headed *atom*. Henry watched him, inwardly grinning. Clark finally reached *atom*, turned a few more pages to *atomic energy*, and settled back to read. The room was quiet except for a solitary fly buzzing against the window, vainly seeking an exit. Henry glanced around his den, examining his many bookshelves, fondly contemplating the filing cabinets, feeling quite proud of it all. His filing cabinets bulged with already - published stories and early drafts of others waiting only to be polished and mailed out. His shelves contained many reference works of invaluable nature.

Upon those few occasions when he was called upon to lecture a ladies club or a student-writer's meeting, he liked to say that a successful writer is a well-read writer. It was best to instill in those eager young minds there was no shortcut to literary fame, no easy way; one must—

"Hey!" Clark's startled yell punctured his thoughts and the silence of the room. "It *is* here!"

"Of course," Cary Carew said with simple dignity. Authenticity was the life-blood of fine fiction.

"What?" an incredulous Groves demanded.

"Every blasted word of it," Clark declared. "Word for word!"

"Oh, come now," Carew protested midly. "I'm not a plagarist. I always make it a point to rewrite my source material."

"But it can't be—it hasn't been released!"

"Has," Henry, repeated.

"This is impossible! It isn't supposed to be in public print."

"Is," Henry said.

"There's something wrong here—something awfully wrong."

"You," Henry suggested.

Groves reached for the volume and almost tore it from his companion's hand. Clark whirled to the bookcase and searched rapidly along the spines, checking the alphabetical keys. He was searching for the matter on rocketry, especially those recent rockets fired from White Sands, New Mexico.

"Volume twenty-nine," Henry said helpfully.

Clark muttered his thanks and jerked at the volume. The period of silence was repeated, and in due time, the stunned exclamation of disbelief. Groves meanwhile had read the article on atomic energy and was gaping at the wallpaper. There, in print, was a concise summary of millions of secret words now locked away in Washington vaults! It was fantastic. He looked across the room to Clark's face and found a similar answer there. Clark had just finished reading another summary on the White Sands experimental rockets, information supposed to be known only to White Sands and Washington. Wonderingly, Groves turned over the volume in his hands and stared at the spine. The encyclopedia had been published by an old and respected New York firm.

"What else," he asked, in somewhat of a daze, "has Dan Devlin done? What more have you released?"

"Well," Cary Carew said modestly, "there was the adventure of the atomic cannon, and some nasty business involving plutonium hand grenades, and right now a magazine is preparing for publication my latest story about biological warfare. An enemy spy sneaks into the Maryland—"

A suspicious Clark cut him off short. "Is that in here too?"

Henry nodded. "Volume three, I think."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes," Henry assured him.

Groves seemed to have recovered his presence of mind. "Where did you get this encyclopedia set?"

"From a peddler."

"A peddler?"

"Yes. There's always somebody

stopping here, interrupting my work. The doorbell is broken—well, not broken altogether, but it goes *ting-ting-thunk* you see, and that gets on my nerves after a while. Only I didn't mind one day last week because a good-looking girl stopped by, selling pots and pans, and I said to her—

"The book peddler," Groves repeated impatiently.

"He was just a peddler. I was working on something or other and the doorbell went *ting-ting-thunk* and there he stood. I really didn't mind after a while because it *is* a good set, and I needed it. Sixty-five dollars."

"Sixty-five dollars!" Clark was holding his head in his hands. "More than ten years work, for sixty-five dollars."

"What's the matter with him?" Henry asked.

Groves regarded Henry Mason as he would a child.

"He's upset," he explained clearly and slowly. "He's unhappy. He's a United States secret agent. For ten years or more he and hundreds like him have labored long and hard to keep our wartime secrets *secret* to keep them from the prying eyes of the world, and you buy a sixty-five dollar set of books which permits your Dan Devlin to reveal everything. To be blunt, he's disenchanted."

Henry gazed at the bent head of the other agent and said, "Oh."

"Now listen carefully. I want you to tell me about this peddler; I want you to describe him in detail, and repeat what he said to you. I want to know the whole thing."

"Why?"

"Because it still might not be too late. If only a few thousand copies of this set have been sold, may be able to gather them up and burn them."

"You expect me to remember a casual transaction that happened a year ago?" Henry demanded petulently.

"You have a keen ear for dialogue," Groves said.

The unfair blow found its mark. "Certainly," Henry declared. "Well now, let me think for a minute—" He closed his eyes and put his fingertips on them. "It was like this. . . ."

The door bell chimed its familiar one-two-three pattern, a tinkling *ting-ting-thunk*. Henry frowned at the galley proofs he was reading, and twisted around in his chair to stare through the window. One irritating interruption after another; if he didn't finish correcting the proofs and get them off in another day they would be late in reaching the printer— and most

likely that would mean his book would lose its scheduled press-time, and so be late in reaching the bindery and then the stores, and wouldn't be published in time for the Christmas trade after all. And in addition to all those horrible things, Miss Winston in his publisher's production department would write him a scathing letter.

Henry sighed and pushed the galleys aside, to get up from the desk and go through the adjoining room to the door. He opened it and found an elderly gentleman wearing a walrus moustache standing there, beaming cheerily.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Carew, good morning, good morning. A fine day for the creative instinct, is it not? And how is your work coming?"

"Well . . .okay, I guess," Cary Carew told him. "But I don't want any."

"Mr. Carew, how can you say that? No man may boast he is well-read or well-informed without a solid backgrounding in the literary treasure of the world, a repository of the accumulated wealth and knowledge of the centuries. Mr. Carew, a man of your reputation simply can't afford to be without one."

Cary Carew watched the walrus moustache bouncing on the fellow's upper lip as he talked. "Without one what?"

"Mr. Carew, I was hoping you would ask me that question! It reveals you as a man of discernment, a man of eager and inquiring mind, a man who seeks truth and light in an otherwise dark and ignorant world. Mr. Carew, you may well pride yourself on your advanced mental faculties." The elderly gentleman blew steadily on, bewailing the backward ways of the outside world and loudly admiring the towering pillar of strength and light in the person of Cary Carew. The moustache wagged madly and the old gentleman worked up quite a head of steam. "You sir," he said, "need one."

"Need one what?" Henry repeated.

"A modern and up-to-date world encyclopedia in only thirty-six magnificent volumes, a storehouse of knowledge smartly and fully covering the world of yesterday and today. I happen to have in my hand the initial volume. Notice the fine binding and the delicate, expensive goldleaf lettering; now let us flip open a few pages so that you may see the expensive printing techniques and the sturdy paper. This set is quaranteed to last a lifetime, Mr. Carew, and the life-times of those children who will come after you."

"I'm not married."

"A man of your literary worth simply can't afford to be without one."

"How much?" Henry asked cautiously.

"Only sixty-seven dollars and fifty cents. A rare bargain in this day of advancing prices and shoddy materials."

Henry fingered the volume. "Is it new?" he asked suddenly. "I don't want anything out of date—"

"New? My dear Mr. Carew, look at this!" And the peddler opened the front cover to turn a few pages, stopping at last on a colored frontispiece facing the title page. He turned the book about so that Henry might see. Lithographed in four beautiful colors was a picture of a handsome and distinguished man, while below it ran the printed legend:

Dwight D. Eisenhower
President of the United States
1952—

"Well, yes," Henry agreed. "It's new all right." His practiced eye ran down the title page, noting the type arrangement and layout, the names of the several editors and the publisher, coming to rest at last on the copyright date. The Roman numerals caught his eye, and he returned to them to read them a second time, more slowly.

"Aha!" he crowed in the salesman's face. "An error!"

"No!" The walrus moustache shot high.

"Yes. It so happens I can read Roman numerals. Look at this: MCMLV. Clearly, a typographical error. The proofreader was not on the job."

"Oh, my, my, my," the salesman said. "Tch, tch, tch. Mr. Carew, I am most distressed at this flaw in my offering. I am moved to make a reduction. Sixty-five dollars."

Henry grinned to himself, believing he had driven a hard bargain. "I'll take it."

The old gentleman scurried out to an automobile standing at the curb and returned with the remaining thirty-five volumes. He accepted Henry's check, bid him a cheery farewell, and drove away. Henry at once forgot about the waiting galley proofs, to sit down and thumb the volumes, searching for information he might put into the hands of Dan Devlin.

"And that's all there was was to it," he said to Groves.

Groves had followed the recital by opening the first volume to the lithographed picture and the title page. Now he started at the copyright notice. "What does MCMLV mean? Why is it an error?"

Henry leaned over his shoulder. "The MCM is nineteen hundred; that first M indicates one thou-

sand while the following CM indicates nine hundred— a hundred less than a thousand. Had the C. followed the M it would have indicated one hundred plus a thousand. So, nineteen hundred. The L is fifty and the V, five. 1955. It should have read 1954, of course."

Across the room, Clark was rapidly pulling volumes from the shelf to examine the date in each. After a while he looked up. "They all have the same date."

"Of course," Henry agreed. "I got two-fifty off."

He thought to add, "I've had only one disappointment with the set. There's nothing in it about the space station."

Clark jerked around suddenly. "Space station?"

"Yeah, you know. During the last war, Germany had plans for a space-platform to be anchored in the sky— a thousand miles up. Following the war the United States took over the plans. There has been an awful lot of speculation in the magazines about the space-station, pictures and such; some say it will be a refueling station for rockets going to the moon, and other claim it will make a military observation post as it encircles the earth. It had occured to me that Dan Devlin could make an adventure of it."

"And there is nothing in these books about it?" Clark demanded anxiously. "Nothing about a space station?"

"Not a word. Quite a disappointment, really."

Clark looked at Groves, closed his eyes and sighed. Quite clearly and audibly he thanked his God. When he had opened them again he made a request of Henry.

"I want to use your telephone."

"In there," pointing.

Henry and Groves remained silent, listening. They couldn't help listening because the instrument was so near. Clark called his headquarters in Washington and described the entire situation; holding a volume in his hand, he read off the title page and then told of the typographical error that had been discovered, told the supposedly-secret information contained in its pages, and told how Dan Devlin had made free use of that classified information to win many fictional battles with an enemy spy. There followed a long period of silence. Clark waited, toying with the phone, staring out the window, turning around to find the two men watching him.

"They're calling New York to check with the publisher," he explained to Groves. Groves nodded and the silence went on. After several minutes the distant voice spoke again and the C. I. C. agent ex-

ploded violently.

"It is too! I've got one right here in my hand!" The voice continued at a fast clip. Clark said, "Yes, he's here with me. He'll verify it. Thirty-six volumes." He listened some more and his face became a dull crimson. He said finally, stiffly, "Yes sir," and hung up.

Groves watched him expectantly.

"That edition doesn't exist," Clark said, waving his hand at the book shelf. "The New York publisher hasn't printed it yet."

"Nonsense," Henry exclaimed.

Clark stabbed a glance at the writer. "The publisher said he hasn't issued an edition of that encyclopedia since 1949. He further said they are considering a new edition in about a year, pending the release of certain material by Washington. In short, if Washington reveals enough to make a new edition worthwhile, they'll go to press."

"Sixty-five dollars," Henry reminded him, pointing to the sprawled books. "I've used them for months."

"Yes, you have." Clark brought forth a wallet and carefully counted out sixty-five dollars. He handed the money to the writer. "I'll need a receipt."

"What's this for?"

"For an encyclopedia set which doesn't exist. My orders are to seize the books."

"You can't do that!"

"I am doing it. The receipt, please."

"But I need that set!"

"You can buy another downtown," Clark reminded him, and then added bitterly, "And this time buy a set that does exist. Buy some that were printed a few years ago." He stooped and began picking up books. Groves jumped to help him.

Henry watched them. "Big-brothers!" he snarled suddenly.

They went on with their seizure.

The doorbell chimed its familiar ont-two-three pattern, *ting-ting-thunk*. Henry paused in the middle of a sentence and contemplated stuffing the chimes with rags to prevent the constant interruptions. It had been difficult going the last few days without the familiar volumes to encourage him, and at the moment Dan Devlin was involved in a plot with counterfeitors that was downright stupid.

He growled aloud and pushed back the chair to go to the door. A shiny new car stood at the curb, a car he had not seen on the streets before. It seemed to resemble those experimental models found only at Automobile shows, a hint of things to come. The car was very low and sleek and futuristic. He stared in wonder.

A voice below the level of his eyes sang out a cheery greeting. "Ah, good morning, Mr. Carew, good morning, good morning! A striking day for the creative urge of an author, is it not? And how is your good work progressing?"

Cary Carew dropped his gaze from the remarkable automobile to stare at the elderly gentleman wearing a walrus moustache. "Bad." he said. "I lost my encyclopedia set and can't do research."

"Indeed, sir?" the old man exclaimed. "How very fortunate that I happened along. I happen to have in my hand the initial volume of a brand new edition, fresh from the presses. Let your fingers feel the fine texture of the cloth, examine if you will the strong, white paper and the large easy-to-read type. I assure you, Mr. Carew, this new edition will surplant in every way all other encyclopedias, bringing to the fore as it does the latest developements the world over! And at the same amazing low price of sixty-seven dollars and fifty cents."

Henry regarded him closely. "Does it tell all about the space platform?"

"Of course, of course, my dear sir. The very latest reports about the entire matter, plus, of course, allied fields. This new edition is years ahead of all others. But wait a moment and see for yourself." The old fellow turned and hurried to the shining new car. From the trunk he brought forth an encyclopedia set and in three trips had carried the thirty-six volumes to the door. "I invite your closest inspection, Mr. Carew. A man of your outstanding intelligence wants only the best."

Cary Carew reached down for the volumes keyed *Soci-Suda* and riffled the pages, seeking out the desired subject matter. His eyes opened wide in delight. There it was, some three and a half columns concerning space-stations, space platforms, orbits, military advantages and the like. "Sold!" he declared instantly.

"A most discerning gentleman," the peddler said.

Hurriedly, Henry had a belated second thought and turned back to title page to read the copyright date. His accusing eyes lifted to the old gentleman's face and he thought to wag a reproving finger beneath the moustache.

"Tch, tch," he said. "The same error."

"Really?" the peddled asked. He peered at the offending date. "This is most unfortunate."

"MCMLVII," Cary read aloud. "That's 1957. Your proofreaders aren't very alert."

" I admire your vast knowledge, sir!" the peddler said. "You wits

are as as sharp as your eyes. Suppose I reduce the price by two dollars and a half?"

"Sold," Henry repeated, and wrote out a check. He carried the thirty-six volumes inside the door, and then waited there to watch the old gentleman drive away. That was certainly a spectacular car—something you wouldn't expect to find on the streets for five or ten years yet.

Henry selected the one prized volume and retired to his den. He drew from the typewriter the counterfeiting story and threw it in the wastebasket, settled back to read up on space station data in preparation for Dan Devlin's next exploit.

THE END

What's Waiting For Russia ---Or Mars!

DEPICTED on the front cover of this issue is a scene that is unusual for a science fiction magazine—because it's a photo, it's retouched, and it isn't in color. It represents a milestone in science fiction which will take the ripest (?) viewpoint in science fiction to explain (and by that we mean in terms of years of experience.)

First, science fiction has just gone through its "maturity" throes, wherein it graduated from short pants, and really came of age. Mentally of age. You see, science fiction has just enjoyed its big "boom" where it left the domain of the "fan" and entered the realm of "fair competition," the general public reservation. On this reservation there are Indians, all of them dead, having died there when Indian stories and Western experienced the same "boom" many years ago. In short, science fiction grew up—and fell dead! Of age. Very briefly, the public acceptance was short—and bitter. Nobody liked the stuff. Not that we blame them, because it has been lousy. People who knew nothing about science fiction were disseminating it in reams. They thought science fiction was

"case histories from a psychiatrists file;" "off-beat descriptions of insane people;" "something screwy"; "something not containing a story about people, but an incident in a bawdy house;" "monsters;" "Ray Bradbury." Well, they were wrong. But they did their dirty work, then ran, their tails between their legs.

We had to do something. The type of cover previously used was now a "tag" labeling science fiction "that crud." So. we changed the cover completely. It looks slightly like TIME in its early days. It looks almost like . . . well, it looks different. We hope it will be accepted behind its new face, will not suffer from the horrible nightmare science fiction has gone through. And we think you will like the new, mature appearance. We're aiming at realistic, common sense people; like science fiction readers were before the "looney bin stampede" began. We are trying to hint, via the cover, that the inside content is good, solid stuff, fit for anybody, and carefully planned through years of experience. You won't be sickened by the utterly incongruous and the utterly ridiculous; nor by the ineptness and the feeble attempt at "shocking" you into buying by sensationalism (which today is linked with sex crimes and psychiantry.)

Next, we are presenting the best science fiction obtainable, and not much is being written. We hope the new cover, the new (how old!) treatment of stories, will once again attract competent writers who won't stoop to (or reach up for, knowing no better) cheap sensationalism, and will write what we'd like to call real literature. Yes, real literature can be written with a science fiction background. And thus, we want our stories to be important. Basic, about people, and about the things science really stands for.

The third thing to explain about this month's cover is what it portrays. And herein we have a few theories to propound which might serve to make you think.

This cover, a composite between a photo and a drawing, shows the new "Nike" rocket, homing on a "flying saucer." Actually it wouldn't work this way, because we had to "foreshorten" the scene to get it all in. The saucer would actually be far beyond the horizon, still out of sight. The rockets would be homing on it by electronics and not by visual aiming as it seems

(*Concluded on Page* 129)

THE CLUB HOUSE

By Rog Phillips

WHEN I'm in Los Angeles my favorite newspaper is the Mirror, and my favorite column in that paper is Paul Koats' column. I seldom read columns, but what attracted me to it in the first place was the fact I used to know a fellow by the name of Jim Koats in Spokane years ago. One day I met Jim Koats on the street and he borrowed ten bucks from me. Two days later he was arrested for having murdered his wife a couple of months before that, weighting her body down and dropping it in the Little Spokane River near a cabin he owned. He was never brought to trial because he died of T. B., complicated by yellow jaundice before the case came up in court, I never got my ten bucks back. So naturally Paul Koats' column in the Mirror caught my eye. Paul has an intriguing style in his column. About once a week he devotes his column to excerpts from letters, with wonderful one line replies under the excerpts, calculated to getting up the dander of those who wrote.

I have a couple of letters from more or less incensed people over my first column two issues ago, and I don't quite know what to do with them. One of them is two thousand words long, double spaced, for publication. The other is about eight hundred words. Both of them demanded to be published.

The way Paul Koats would handle it, he would take the opening sentence of the first letter and give a two word comment — like this:

Dear Rog:

I'd call you a liar if I didn't know you're a pretty nice guy. . .

Joe Gibson
24 Kensington Ave.
Jersey City 4, N. J.

Thanks, Joe. — Rog

Cute, huh? I kind of like it. It has a certain touch. Besides making Joe boiling mad and filled

with frustration it should evoke chuckles galore. And it is pure Koatsiana.

The second letter is a little tougher to handle because it wasn't sent to me but was turned over to me for an answer. But anyway, here goes:

Dear B:

. . . what prompts me to write and wish this letter to see print was Rog Phillips' lively report and write-up on conventions, fandom, et al.; though however interesting it may appear in print, it, nevertheless, is subject to the following flaws of the true facts which were stated. . .

Calvin Thos. Beck
Box 497
Hackensack, N. J.

Et al, — Rog

That "et al" is more Koatsian than something like "Pardon me for listening" which would be a shade childish and a shade smart aleck, or something like "I'm more interested in untrue facts, Cal" or "Your remarks are completely unparsable, Cal," which although quite witty, overstress the obvious.

So you see, I could do that to those two letters, then more irate letters would come in, and I could do the same to them. Eventually I could build up a sort of a half of a reputation as a wit — at the expense of the dignity of a never ending string of nice guys. They would be at my mercy so long as I lasted, which wouldn't be too long, because Ray and Bea aren't going to let Universe become a magazine, one part of which is the Club House, the other part of which is feud letters and articles directed at the Club House. A story or two has to be squeezed into every issue for those who like science fiction.

There is the alternative of ignoring those letters — giving people who disagree with me no voice whatever. That's even more unfair than holding them up to ridicule.

But I can't publish the entire contents of those two letters. Mr. Beck's letter is two thousand words, and brings in names that would lead to more letters demanding to be published. In addition it contains statements which Mr. Beck thinks are facts but which definitely aren't, such as his statement that the Queens group, Q. S. F. L., has not been in existence "for some four years," when I myself spoke before that group three years ago and found it to be very much alive and with no signs of dying so long as Mrs. Sykora's ability as a cook contin-

ues undiminished.

And Joe Gibson's strongly worded letter (he privately insisted,) was more for the purpose of starting an interesting controversy than anything else. So, getting back to where I started, what do I do with 'em? (Before I go into that, let me mention that Joe Gibson also stuck his neck out with statements that aren't facts. or, as Calvin Beck so aptly put it, "true facts.")

My purpose in writing the expose of what happened at Chicago was constructive. I think ninety percent of you know that. So what I want to do is lift out the constructive parts of Joe's and Cal's letters and present them.

Calvin Thos. Beck says, "It is suggested, therefore, that at all world conventions from now on, any city wishing to put in its bid as a site for the next year's convention must present a record of its recent history, covering a twelve-month period, and listing its various accomplishments affairs, etc . . Cities proving greater merit in this direction would take precedence over those which do not, which would disqualify inferior 'runners-up." Carried on from there, the vote must go to the city that has been known to have achieved the most in local affairs of recent date."

Joe Gibson says, "And as for the plan you suggest to solve all these troubles, it wouldn't work. You said, 'It would make the local non-fans who attend every convention a negligible factor as a voting bloc.' It wouldn't. They pay their dollars and are convention members just as much as any active fan. A plan that could work is a rotation plan. Maybe you don't know about this, either, but a number of fans who do are working on it. The Frisco Committee is supposed to have one ready for fandom to vote on. There are plenty of headaches involved. But fans aren't ignoring this situation."

Joe, fans "haven't been ignoring" this problem for several years. What about the plans discussed and voted down or otherwise rejected in 1952 and 1953? "Frisco is supposed to have one ready" in 1954. As I write this on July 6th, I have *heard* of some sort of bulletin Frisco is supposed to have sent out. I paid my dollar for membership last fall and haven't received my membership card or anything else. There are others that haven't.

It won't work to have "a few of the boys gather 'round" some evening the week before the convention and say, "Oh yes,

(yawnnn), we are supposed to have some sort of (yawnnn, pard'n me) plan ready to correct the evils of how we pick the next convention site. We must think of something. . ."

The only thing that will work is a plan that gains momentum and popular support.

One last thing I would like to mention is this: most fans who know they aren't going to be able to attend the world convention don't waste a dollar on it. If that dollar bought them the right to vote on the site for the next convention, giving them the hope that they might help to bring it close enough so they could afford the train ticket, they would send in their buck in order to have a vote. That would bring in from a hundred to maybe five hundred extra dollars for the convention each year— and that ain't in Venusian linoleums, either!

Using the Koats Method on the next letter in the stack . . .

Dear Rog:

I seem to recall from somewhere that the Club House was dedicated to the S-F club; and from my general observations, it has degenerated into just another column on general crifanac — with clubs seldom being mentioned. It is just a guess, but I think that this can be laid to the door of lack of material and little or no meat on the bones of what you do know.

Project Fan Club
Orville W. Mosher
1728 Mayfair
Emporia, Kansas

I'll bone up Orv. — Rog

Orville is conducting research with the objective of writing and publishing a booklet on "the formation, care, and improvement of local fan clubs." Later on in his letter he says, "I can not use all the material I have here, unless I wanted to write several volumes on the history of each club. I don't, so most of the material will go to waste . . . I would be willing to turn over some of this material to you. . ."

Sorry, Orville, I can't use it. I can use only live material. Clubs break up and are formed all the time, and there are so many that to publish even their names and locations in a complete list would require several pages. The primary purpose of the Club House is to introduce the non-fan newcomer to science fiction to the fanzines that have been published during the past two or three months and which are still available. That introduces the newcomer to the activities of fandom. Through the

fanzines he can find out about the other activities of fandom, and in a short time learn where his fan neighbors live and get in touch with them.

In reading your letter, Orv, an idea struck me, and I can't see anything wrong with it. A local club that wants new members could mimeo a brief note giving data on the next meeting, and go around to the local newstands and slip it in each copy of a prozine on the racks so that whoever bought that copy would see and read it. It wouldn't take much work and should bring good results. Certainly no one would object. Or — how about you providing the information for newcomers, Orv? Any of you writing to him to find out where your local fan club meets, be SURE to enclose a self-addressed and stamped envelopes for his convenience in giving you that information. A small card for him to write the information would help too. Then he would only have to look it up and jot it down.

This doesn't mean that I won't mention local clubs from time to time. In the last issue I mentioned some of them. But, primarily, the Club House will confine itself to things that are of universal rather than local interest and availability. The non-fan reader living in St. Louis isn't going to get actively curious about the Little Monsters club in West Berrydale, Alberta, *unless* the L. M.'s spend their evenings stenciling and cranking stuff out of a mimeo that will be available to him. So why do I call my column the Club House? I like the name and everyone knows it and what is is by now. And it *is* about the most remarkable club ever to exist — stf fandom, which has no charter no officers, no membership certificate, and which you join simply by deciding you are a fan, and which you quit simply by deciding you are through. (Of course, sometimes in order to quit fandom you have to move to another city and leave no forwarding address, and perhaps change your name. But usually quitting fandom is simple, and in almost any city you can find ex-fans of year's standing, who write prolifically for the fanzines, make lengthy speeches at various fan clubs on why they quit fandom, etc. — I mean et al.

* * * *

And now at long last, you patient newcomers to stfandom, I'll review the fanzines. With each, I give the name, the price, and where to send for it. Over the years I have placed my personal guarantee that you will get your

money's worth in satisfaction from each one or I will personally refund the money you send its editor. So far no one has ever taken me up on that even though now and then a fanzine stops publishing before my review hits the stands and the editor sends nothing for the money given him. But the offer holds. I'm all for these fan editors who put in most of their spare time on their magazines. They are the backbone of fandom and without the fanzines there would soon be no active fandom at all.

DEVIANT: No. 2; 20c; Carol McKinney, Sta. 1, Box 514, Provo, Utah. I went through the stack and picked this one to review first for a special reason. I'm in a nostalgic mood. Fanzines to review again. I've reviewed hundreds of them in the past, and gained a panoramic view of the field. Out of that panorama grew a concept of a fanzine that is typical of fandom and all it stands for and tries to reach for. By its very nature, that ideal fanzine is neither the worst nor the best, being alive rather than perfect. And Deviant merely happens to approximate that nostalgic ideal more closely than the others on hand for review this time.

It has plenty of art work. It has poems. It has cartoons. It has stories. It has articles. It even has an open letter to Lyle Kessler by Rick Sneary. And its mimeography and the way it's put together show the loving care and skill of a true fan publisher. Thirty two pages. Circulation for this issue, two hundred and ten.

BREVIZINE: 15c; bimonthly; Erwin Hughmont editor; 5369 W. 89th St., Oak Lawn, Illinois. Slip-sheeting would make the mimeography neater, but the content is top quality amateur fiction. Take "A Coffin For Mike"' by Howard Barton, for example. It starts out with two characters, Big Mike and Jake, trying to rent a coffin for one night, and succeeding. What happens after that shows why it isn't easy to *rent* a coffin. Then there's "How Ghastly She Looks" by Elmer R. Kirk. (Elmer, why the heck don't you sell that title to Spillane? It's a natural for him!) Anyway, the story concerns a college prof assigned to the task of picking a really ghastly looking wench to play the part of a witch in a school play. He goes searching down on *Jasmine* Street, and finds one in a dive no professor should even be seen dead in . . . et al. And what a ghastly

wench. "She smiled, and her upper plate dropped exposing toothless gums. . ." Not only that, she had a crush on the prof — and a jealous husband.

Those two stories are just two samples out of six stories in the July issue, and are neither the best nor the worst. They're good, and you'll be glad you sent for the fanzine.

IT: 15c; Walter W. Lee, Jr., 1205 S. 10th St., Coos Bay, Oregon. It's volume I number 4, Summer, nineteen fifty — WHAT? — 1953? You can't tell, though. Walt and his co-partner in crime, Bob Chambers, proudly announce that they have an irregular publishing schedule, so that date may be a gag. The pages aren't yellowed with age, but there's a film review of War of the Worlds. Still, H. G. Wells movie might not have shown at Coos Bay until this year.

It has an unusual cover of black paper with yellow and green air-brushed on to form an almost 3-d effect — I'll take that back. I looked closer. It's a paste job, and a very good one. A well balanced contents; two stories, two movie reviews, two meet-the-fan articles, an article about pogo with some nice and quite authentic looking pogo cartoons, an article on rocket fuels, two book reviews, and a couple of poems. The pogo article is the best item in the zine.

From summer 1953 we jump to fall, 1954 in the up-to-date.

SPACEWAYS: 15c; Ralph Stapenhorst 409 W. Lexington Dr., Glendale 3, Calif., who is a good artist, judging from his cover. This is a dittoed job. Dittoing is easier and neater than mimeographing, but the machine costs a little more. There is quite a bit of artwork in the 34 pages, which always makes for an entertaining magazine. My old friend Ray Clancy has a poem, "Fishermen of Space," and Terry Carr has some cute cartoons called "Face Critturs."

One of the five articles in the zine is about the canals of Mars, giving the history of astronomical thought on the subject. I wonder what those "canals" will turn out to be when we land there and look? Maybe they're a superhighway system connecting cities. Maybe they're giant sand ridges formed by constant winds similar to the tradewinds of our two big oceans, along great circles of the planet.

Couple of short stories and the last part of a four part serial complete the issue.

INSIDE: 25c; Ronald Smith, 549 E. 10th St., San Jose, Calif. A professional photo-offset print job, 32 pages. The kind the editor might break even on with the printer's bill if he sold a thousand copies — which he seldom does. The advantage of photo-offset is that you get good reproduction of photos. In the issue on hand, the May 1954 one, is a picture of Forry Ackerman, and one of Hannes Bok, and also one of Sam Sacket, who edits Fantastic Worlds, a similar photo-offset zine devoted to publishing the best of Fan Fiction.

SFANZINE; 15c; Sam Johnson, 1517 Penny Dr. Edgewood, Elizabeth City, N. C. This is a last issue, and not available, so I won't review it except to say that it is an unusually good fanzine. Sam is bringing out a fanzine about now which will be even better. Its name has not been decided upon, but I recommend it for this reason: in Sam's editorial page he states, "If you want something published in this mag it had better be GOOD. If the stuff wouldn't sell in a promag *I'm* not going to use it unless it's strictly of a fannish nature. This may sound a bit high hattish to some of you, but if I can't get some really good entertainment for the readers what would be the use of wasting my time?" And he has what he believes to be some really good stuff lined up for at least the first issue of the new mag, so it's worth a try.

PSYCHOTIC No. 13: Richard E. Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon; 10c, 3 for a quarter. A dittoed zine and very typically fannish, on the humor side with Harlan Ellison, Boy Genius, leading the pack with a story called, "The Little Boy Who Loved Cats."

FOG: 5c, April issue No. 3; Don Wegars, 2444 Valley St., Berkeley 2, Calif. Circulation, fifty copies. In this zine we get closer to the real fan element and its purely fan activity. Fan names and addresses and what they are doing. You go down into the basement fanzine factory and make yourself at home. A quick way to get acquainted and see what's doing.

KAYMAR No. 83: 10c or 4 25c; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave. So., Moorhead, Minnesota. This is for people with back issue prozines, stf books, etc., to sell or wanted to buy. It's been published for as long as I've known of fanzines, which is over nine

years. It's bigger than it used to be, so the woods must be full of collectors of science fiction and fantasy. In looking over the dozens of ads in this issue I find the prices of most of the books and back issue magazines considerably lower than they were three years ago. By the way, does anyone have copies of two of my pocket novels, "Time Trap," and "Worlds Within" they would sell me?

XENERN INDEX: 6c; Wm. D. Knapheide, 902 Oak St., No. C. San Francisco 17, Calif. These are something new, and for the dyed in the wool fan. Numbers 1 and 2 are card indexes of various fanzines, listing all the professional reviews. For example: the card for Burroughs Bulletin lists six issues and page numbers of Amazing Stories of reviews I gave that fanzine in Amazing Stories, from June 1948 to Jan. 1950, plus ten other reviews it had in other magazines. This could develop into an invaluable set of cards in time. Nine of them, stapled together at one corner. Remove the staple and they're ready for filing.

ISFANNISH: 5c for a sample copy. (I stated that price on my own responsibility.) Published by the Indiana Science Fiction Association, editor Lee Anne Trempor, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis 1, Ind. This is a live club, holding meetings every other week. Out of town membership is $1.50 a year and gives you the fanzine It's called a newszine, but is much more fannish and homey than that.

Along with it is a first issue of ISFA, a bi-monthly fanzine sponsored by the club. 15c a copy. Edward McNulty, 5645 N. Winthrop St., Indianapolis. It's a good first issue, with some entertaining articles and stories in its 19 pages. But ISFANNISH will give you a much better idea of the club and its members.

From the same city, and somewhat at odds with ISFA is:

GALACTIC POST: 10c; "official organ of the Galactic Glee and Perloo Stf Society." They price it at 25c, but it's only worth a dime. Ray Beam, 640 W. Tenth St., Apt. 1 Indianapolis, Ind., The editorial takes some pot shots at ISFA and it's "isolationist" officers. Altogether, it's an enjoyable insurgent fanzine and reminds me of the good old days of Los Angeles when LASFS was agin Amazing Stories, and the insurgents sided with Amazing against the "common enemy" in a delightful feud. Get this, and

also the May 11th issue of ISFANNISH for both sides of the schism.

SCIENTIFICTION STORIES No. 2: June 1954; 5c and worth three times that much; John D. Walston, 1044-88th N. E. Bellevue, Washington. It lacks a contents page, but you'll read it right on through anyway, so who cares. It leads off with a short-short story by David H. Keller, M. D., which is of course quite good. Even better is the next, "Sen Yat Foo," by Don Wagers. Other stories too. The letter column is called "The Verdict," which is new to me. (Someone ought to make a list of all the names that letter columns have been called.) And there's a big ad for Goof-Off brand Cigarettes, preferred 79-1 by Martians. Don't irritate your gills.

* * *

That completes the fanzine reviews. Are you a newcomer? Then I'd say, send for them all. You'll have hours of real fannish pleasure and get a good cross section of fandom. And you'll subscribe to at least a couple after that. Science fiction fandom is the eighth wonder of the world, and you're in for a delightful time when you get acquainted.

And you fan eds, get your fanzines in to me for review. Don't send me any more 1953 editions though without some explanation. The readers want live stuff from live fans.

You can send your zines to me at Apt. 308, 6613 S. Normal, Chicago 21, Illinois. Bye now. . .

—ROG PHILLIPS

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MY ENCHANTED AUNT

By Len Guttridge

Aunt Lucy had always been rather eccentric, you'd have to admit that, but this was going a little too far. Mother shrieked, father swore and Aunt Lucy — well, read on and see.

WE were living in Wales and I was ten when my Aunt Lucy changed into a horse. In fact, early symptoms appeared on my birthday. Surface indications, you might say. For all we knew, things were already happening to her but out of sight.

There it was then, my birthday party and, as usual, father had established himself as life and soul of it. He had supervised a gamut of child party games until the floor was littered with our tiny, panting bodies, while about us sat an assortment of callously beaming elders.

Then the Life and Soul of the party told three funny stories. Perhaps more *elusive* than funny. The first was received with baffled silence. The second ended in loud guffaws—father's. To the third we responded more generously, with only a trace of puzzlement. That is, we all tittered—except Aunt Lucy. She neighed.

Abruptly silenced, we stared at her. She continued neighing. Then, with an odd little squeak, she stopped. Well. If you had seen us children. We rolled on our backs, our faces crimson. Had father told a hundred jokes he could never have produced such mirth. He sensed this, and resented the competition. Icily he said, "Lucy, we weren't aware that you could perform animal impersonations."

"I c-can't," stammered my

aunt, desperate to withdraw from the sensation she had caused. "I can't. It . . . it just came out."

To this father was speechless. We knew from his frequent outbursts that he had never become accustomed to the eccentricities of his wife's cousin. For some moments he studied her with a look of near-angelic patience. When his humorous monologues were resumed they failed dismally. After Aunt Lucy's horse-laugh they were anti-climactic. For the first time in his career as Life and Soul of the party, father had sort of been dethroned.

Next morning there was fresh excitement when Aunt Lucy was observed at the breakfast table struggling to hold her knife and fork with two hoofs which protruded from her sleeves. Mother promptly fainted, father's mouth fell open and my aunt apologized. "I'm terribly sorry. These . . . these came on in the night." She coughed. "I was hoping you wouldn't . . . notice."

Consternation, as they say, reigned. A development of this nature is bound to cause a stir. Aunt Lucy, naturally, was most upset. She locked herself in her room for the afternoon while the rest of the household trembled with agitation.

I grant you, this was Wales, where magic still rules among the mountains. And Aunt Lucy was a firm believer in it. Many were the nights when she read to my sister Glynis and me from her musty old books. Books full of wonder and fear whose contents bewitched the very pages so that they seemed to turn untouched. Despite the glowing peat fire we would shiver. Sometimes, if we listened carefully, we could hear Cwn Annwn, the lonely spirit hounds, baying at the moon.

And, later in our bedroom, we would try not to glance through the window (although we were deliciously tempted) in case we saw corpse-candles flicker aross the shadowed valley.

Most of all, we liked hearing her tell of Y Tylwyth Teg, the Little People, making their mischief among the ash groves. After all, beyond a mild addiction to cradle snatching, they would do no harm. In fact, (and we have Aunt Lucy's authority for it) if we were kind to Y Tylwyth Teg they would reward us in great and wondrous measure. How could such kindness be demonstrated? For, remember, they couldn't be seen. Well, if you left the kitchen clean and neat overnight for them to play in the warm while you slept, your fortunes would be blessed. Moreso if you placed a portion of food in the corner for them.

Of course, our kitchen was al-

ways spic-and-span, anyway. As for leaving food out, father wouldn't hear of it. Why Y Tylwyth Teg allowed him to live on, in obvious disbelief of their very existence, remains a mystery to me.

Poor father. He was so proud of his ability to cope with any deviation from the household norm, no matter how sudden and unforeseen. It was under heavy strain right now. He sat scratching his head futilely while his chidren huddled solemnly in a corner. Old Doctor Llewellyn was busy with mother whose repeated faintings were beginning to discourage him.

Suddenly, the door flew open and a great brown mare trotted in.

Mother shrieked and swooned again. This time the doctor seemed about to join her.

The animal staggered nervously, its flanks barging with some force into our oaken grandfather clock. Then it waltzed over to the far wall and sent father's magnificently carved pipe crashing to the floor. He let out an anguished howl, "Oh, my meerschaums. Oh, Diawl," he swore, "my meerschaums."

. . . And the clock set up a frantic chiming, although it was nowhere near the hour, and slid to silence like a tired gramophone. The scene froze for a minute into a fantastic tableau. Mother prostrate, the doctor aghast, furniture displaced, the floor strewn with pipes and china ornaments. And dazed but unbowed amid the wreckage—my father. With a horse glancing shyly over his shoulder.

Thus Aunt Lucy's equine debut. She had always been a trifle clumsy of course. But now she had precipitated a domestic crisis which presented father with unheard—of problems. Modifications in her diet and living conditions were essential; obviously, she could no longer sleep in the pink and gold bedroom which was hers ever since she came to our valley.

Enlisting our aid, father got to work on the toolshed in the back garden and within half a day it was a respectable looking stable. Aunt Lucy was affably grazing in the cabbage patch. After we pushed and prodded a little she moved into her new home, turned, and surveyed us with a smug expression not unlike that with which she used to announce some personal triumph at the Ystrad Sewing Guild. Father pondered her then chuckled a comment about the improvement in her appearance. Her smugness vanished. She aimed a vicious kick. He yelped and jumped backwards. His subsequent remarks were an interesting—alas, unprintable—blend of English and Welsh profanity.

Inevitably the neighbors grew curious. Soon our village buzzed with peculiar stories which few believed but all repeated. Snatches of weird gossip floated along the streets.

" . . . Do tell old Dai Jenkins has got rid of his wife's cousin and bought him a horse instead . . . "

" . . . and she's turned into a horse . . . a horse, mind you . . . devil's work, it is . . . "

" . . . it's not proper . . . Vicar should be told . . . ."

" . . . Government ought to step in . . . "

" . . . ah, well, Jenkins' were always a queer lot . . . "

The stories reached even unto our chapel where, from the pulpit and with hotter-than-usual eloquence, old Goronwy ap Jones kindled a very special hellfire for such who would dabble with dark powers. There was no mistaking his import, especially when his fierce eye struck the only member of the Jenkins family present. Me. And as many more glances were directed at me, my cheeks already felt the breath of Vicar ap Jones' fiery furnace.

A week later the first newspaper reporters arrived. A conference in Paris, an earthquake in Peru and two sex-murders in High Wycombe were elbowed off the front page. Our village became the target for four scientists and an array of cranks and inquisitive wanderers who came to scoff and stayed—to scoff.

For who would believe the truth? And eventually they all went away again, feeling cheated. The nine-day oddity became one of those half-forgotten myths with which history is peppered. Like the talking mongoose and Mrs. Guppy's nightgown flight over London. And the eminent Victorian who slid upstairs on a stairway banister.

Then Mr. Frett arrived. A stout, check-suited man who smoked cigars and talked from the side of his mouth as if every word he uttered were in confidence. It transpired that he had been one of the early apostles of skepticism but, following a brief and furtive examination of Aunt Lucy stolen during an afternoon's canter through Madoc Meadow, his disbelief in her rumored origins was replaced by an interest in her present potentials.

For K. W. Frett was a highly successful race-horse owner with an oft-boasted ability to "recognize speedy horseflesh the moment I see it." Aunt Lucy showed no displeasure at the reference to her speedy horseflesh though she did bare her teeth at being called a muscular mare. Frett and father engaged in several secret

meetings. One evening over supper father dropped his bombshell.

"I intend," announced father importantly, "to train Lucy for the races. Mr. Frett has convinced me that she possesses all the—ah—features of a fast horse. Furthermore, he has offered me the use of his racing stables in Sussex. Next week I shall have her shipped there and her training will commence."

"Dai," mother's voice was horror-filled. "Dai, you can't . . . why, it's . . . it's not decent. I won't allow it . . . Lucy, a racehorse . . . No, I won't have it."

Lucy arrived in Sussex a week later.

Frett was right. Her speed was phenomenal. She won several small events and father accumulated wealth so rapidly the sorrowful shakes of mother's head became encouraging nods. Finally, father decided to stake everything on the Derby.

"Do you think Lucy is that good"? said mother doubtfully.

"Never look a gift-horse in the mouth," father said, and roared with laughter. We shuddered.

Some days later, a sniffling cold kept me home from school. Mother was in the village, shopping. Father was somewhere in Sussex. I had the house to myself. I don't know what impulse sent me to my aunt's old room. Perhaps a fear that the *room* might have magical powers had kept us from it since her transformation. But now, in the quiet of the fading day, I pushed the door and tip-toed in.

It was a pretty little room and neat, with a large window looking out across the valley to Craig Y Cefyl, crowned with rainclouds. On a chair beside the bed lay a book. There was a pink feather marking the page where, half-scared, I opened it. The pages were like rust flakes, the print tiny and here and there a word checked me but I would ignore its challenge and skip to the next.

I learned that Aunt Lucy had not been the first to lose human form. Twm Shon Catti, a mountain scamp, had preceded her by a couple of centuries though it wasn't clear just what he had turned into. I read of Blodwenwedd who changed into an owl. And of Gilvaethwy who was transformed first into a deer, then a hog, then a wolf, then a snake, then forgot what he had started out as.

Dusk rolled down from Craig Y Cefyl, flooded the valley and dimmed the room. I found a match, put flame to an oil lamp's wick and read on. My young eyes ached and I risked a fearful scolding from my mother. But no one disturbed.

My lips mumbled aloud the difficult words and the house crouched about me, listening and clearing its throat with wind gusts in the chimney. *Believe in Y Tylwyth Teg all your life,* the book told me, *believe and more, give them clean shelter and good food.* Then would they reward you with the adventure of Change. To a lion for its great strength. To a bird for its superior flight. To a horse for its fleetness of hoof. To a rabbit for its . . . for its . . . the word defied me. But I wished Aunt Lucy had changed into a rabbit.

Kindness to Y Tylwyth Teg was not sufficient. The gift awaited a sign. And the sign was the eating of the fruit that grew from the grave of Wyn Ab Nudd, the King of all the Little People. If you wished for another shape while you so ate . . . then I heard the approaching voices of my mother and sister and I shut the book, put out the lamp and ran downstairs, my poor mind a riot.

At supper, mother read aloud a letter from father. It bubbled with optimism for my aunt's chances in the Derby and was most descriptive of her improved stride. Much of the letter seemed designed to show off father's knowledge of race-track jargon and was therefore meaningless. Less mysterious were a couple of words of paternal solicitude absently tagged on to the end. When she finished reading, mother eyed us helplessly.

"Mam," I asked, thinking of Y Tylwyth Teg and rabbits, "what is feck . . . feck-and-ditty?"

She was unmoved by the question, but her expression of resignation deepened.

Doubtless she felt that father's zealous preoccupation with her cousin (never displayed before *it* happened) might be at the expense of his children's upbringing. She said, "Come to something, it has. What ideas you'll get into your heads . . . " She closed her eyes then opened them. "How can your own father watch you from stables in silly old Sussex?"

But I was wondering about Wyn Ab Nudd's grave.

Next afternoon I stood timidly before Mr. Morris and heard him ask "Why are you so interested in Wyn Ab Nudd?" Bald and beak-nosed, Mr. Morris was our history teacher and having come up from Cardiff, was widely regarded as possessing superior knowledge. If anybody could tell me where Ab Nudd was buried it was Mr. Morris. Once I *knew,* who could tell but that one day I might become a . . . well, anything I wanted? A giraffe, maybe? But I had better watch old Morris.

"I was reading about him," I

said truthfully.

"Well, child," his nose hooked down at me pointing to my very heart. I had the awful fear that he knew and had eaten and was changing into an eagle. "Nobody knows for sure where King Ab Nudd is buried. Some say beneath Bala Lake. Others say on top of Craig Y Cefyl. He chuckled and breathlessly I awaited thick feathered wings to sprout, claws to burst through his black polished boots. "And I've even heard that he is buried near here. Perhaps . . . perhaps the mound on Farmer Hugh's land."

"The mound sir?"

"The mound, child." Again the beak, the smooth shiny head, the piercing eyes. Perhaps he had eaten but wasn't quite kind enough. So he was only half an eagle. "In the old times they burned the bodies of the kings and put the ashes in pots and raised heaps of earth and stones over them. There are many such mounds which we take to be natural hills. There is one in Farmer Hugh's apple orchard."

"In Farmer Hugh's apple orchard, sir?" My voice wavered.

In the dark of his study he loomed over me. His eyes gleamed down that huge comma of a nose.

"In Farmer Hugh's apple orchard," he repeated gravely.

The sun had vanished behind Craig Y Cefyl when I reached the orchard. The apple trees whispered together and scraped their branches on the surrounding wall. Not a soul was in sight for the spot was bleak and the school road leading homeward was a distant grey ribbon. I knew my late arrival would earn me an angry word or even a cuff behind the ear. But the awesome thought that right here, on Farmer Hugh's land, magic apples might grow made me linger, hugging myself in a secret ecstasy of terror.

Because of the high wall, I could not see the mound within. If I were farther up the mountainside . . .

My infant years in this valley were as a scattering of small seeds in the safe palm of a stern but friendly ploughman. Bala Lake and the eternal streams which fed it, the rolling foothills and their loftier black-browed brothers, all knew me and I was of them. But in this dying afternoon they seemed alien and none more so than old Craig Y Cefyl himself.

Although the sweat of fright was on me now, I trudged upward. Oncoming night hung a shapeless drapery of blue mist all over the pitted mountain. Heartbeats shook my whole frame. I stopped and turned.

Below me were the walls and I saw beyond them into the trees.

I saw that the orchard was sparser in the center for there stood the mound, a great grave crowned with a group of trees like petrified high priests. And the trees about the mound were its sentinels.

The wind blew harder up here and I felt exposed to an unnameable sorcery. Overhead the wheeling rooks cawed their defiance. My stare swept up to them wildly and fell back no less wildly to the lonely orchard. Far off, a million miles far off, a tiny light gleamed. The Hugh farmhouse. But it was no match for the primitive force which I felt pulling me back into lost ages, back to the revels and rituals of the cromlechs, crags and circles.

I cried out against the spell of old ghosts and ran headlong down the hill. Oh, I had truly gazed upon the grave of Wyn Ab Nudd and no mistake. And I knew now that Craig Y Cefyl was no protector of mine but the crumbling shield of the sleeping king.

There was magic there all right but I wanted to taste none of it. And I don't think Aunt Lucy had really wanted to either. She had eaten (not knowing the nature of the apple) and wished. That was all. That was enough. But, oh, little Will Jenkins was going to stay as he was with just his two little legs, the same frantic, pounding things which now carried him down to the road and along it, not slowing until the house rose up to gather him into its safe light and the arms of a scolding mother and an optimistic father, just arrived to take us to Epsom for the Derby.

Long before we reached the track I had given up trying to tell father that I knew why Aunt Lucy changed into a horse. Each time I tugged his jacket he testily tapped my hand away. Each time I opened my mouth his glower scared the words on my lips and they crawled back in to be silently swallowed. And mother, having caught some of father's enthusiasm, was similarly inaccessible.

So I shrugged and was soon myself absorbed with the gaudily painted gypsies, the bright green turf, the gay, noisy crowds and the tic-tac boys. Even Aunt Lucy seemed pleased. We recalled she had often wished to attend the Derby—though not, of course, in such an active role as now.

We were introduced to the jockey, a copper-headed man about my size, called Sharpe. He had a small vocabularly but filled in the blanks with unlimited use of the word 'strike' and its derivatives.

When colleagues warned him of Aunt Lucy's doubtful pedigree he jeeringly boasted that he could ride any striking thing. He did-

n't give a strike if Aunt Lucy had been a woman or a striking elephant even, she was a horse now, wasn't she and strike him happy he would ride it.

The crowd roared "They're off", the sun hurried behind a slab of cloud and the horses leapt forward.

They thundered past us, streaming down the track in a lengthening bunch, my aunt leading. Father exploded with glee. "Wheeee!" he screeched and flung his hat skyward. Really, he was more fascinating to watch than the race.

The thinning cluster of horses drifted down the course and became indistinct. Father lifted fieldglasses to his eyes and made a strange remark. "Still leading, she is. Knew a drop of cider wouldn't harm."

Mother turned on him. "Cider, Dai? You've been drinking?"

"Not me, woman. Lucy out there," and he grinned. "Brought a pot of old Farmer Hugh's cider down with me. Dropped a spit or two into Lucy's pail just before the race. Give her more spirit, it will."

"Dai Jenkins," mother cried, "You know Lucy never touches strong drink."

He lowered the field glasses and gestured at the distant horses. "Isn't slowing her, is it. Frett said a little spit was all right. No harm done." He gazed around with a look of jovial innocence. "Just a spit, that's all. Little spit of Farmer Hugh's cider."

I caught the glasses which swung from his shoulder and peered through them. The horses which had survived the perils of Tattenham Corner flashed past my vision, one by one. But not Aunt Lucy.

"Father." My voice foundered in the clamor about me. I raised it. "Father, where's Aunt Lucy?"

"Is my son daft?" father shouted, addressing a nearby stranger who promptly edged away. "Where's Aunt Lucy, indeed." He wheeled on me and grabbed the glasses. "Out in front, that's where she is. Out . . . in . . . " he fingered the adjusting screw, hastily. "Damn glasses. Bit blurred they are . . . "

His voice trailed away.

"Not there, is she?" I said.

A small vague figure speeding towards us assumed clarity and was identified as Sharpe. His face was like chalk *and his hair was white, too.* He was running madly and gasping every few paces, "Strike . . . Oh, strike me happy."

Angrily, father stepped forward. "Sharpe," he bellowed, "what's the matter with you, man. Where's your mount, sir?"

"Oh, strike," replied Sharpe and continued running. He dodged smartly and disappeared over the fields and into the dusk.

I looked at father. His jaw sagged and his eyes widened. We stared in silence at Aunt Lucy advancing self-consciously across the turf. She carried a saddle and trailed harness. She wasn't a horse anymore.

All it had needed was a wish. And the little spit of Farmer Hugh's cider. Give her more spirit. said father. Trust father.

Well. Public reaction to the strange affairs at Epsom suggested that father was suspected of some attempt at trickery. There were several demands for criminal prosecution which, to our horror, he prepared to meet aggressively. Fortunately, they died when an Inquiry conducted by the Royal Racing Commission gave up in despair. A clear judgment could only be based on the testimony of the jockey. Sharpe was found after a nation wide hunt but close examination of his statement revealed nothing more lucid than the word 'strike'. When the Inquiry ended Sharpe immediately retired from racing and shortly after opened a whelk and mussel shop in Ealing.

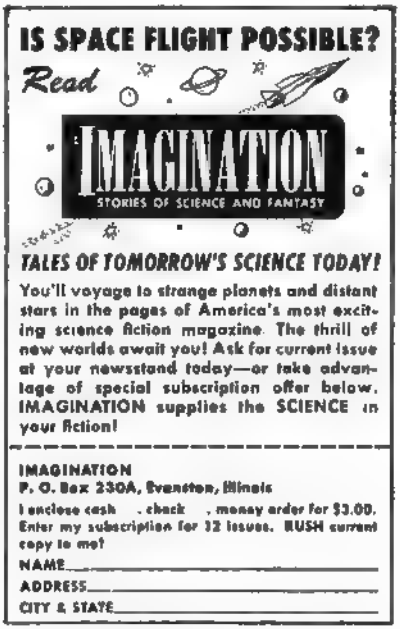
As for father, he stormed sullenly about the house for days muttering. "Every penny I had was on her. Every penny. She had the race, *had* it, mind you. And picks that very minute to . . . to . . . "

As if it were my aunt's fault.

Certainly she was embarrassed by a sense of guilt but handsomely rescued us from penury by marrying a wealthy man indeed, whose wealth we helped her share. For the remaining years of its life as a unit, the Jenkins family wanted for nothing.

The man she married? K. W. Frett, well-known horse fancier. Frett, who could recognize speedy horseflesh the moment he saw it. We all agreed it was plainly a case of love at first sight.

THE END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LETTERS

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UNIVERSE
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Dear Bea,

I've been contemplating writing to you for several months — ever since you left Evanston, in fact— but something always seemed to push the actual deed farther into the future. But the latest UNIVERSE has finally spurred me to write; that, and your last letter to Kemp, which he let me read.

Ed Hamilton's novel was everything I expected it to be: stereotyped, hackneyed, enthralling, exciting, and gorgeously written! Between the two of them, Hamilton and his wife have done this same plot at least half a dozen times, but they never fail to come up with a new twist, or somehow give the story a fresh shot of adrenalin that makes it astonishingly pleasurable to read. Although STARMAN COME HOME is not quite in the top-bracket tradition (no pun intended), it still suffers very little by comparison with THE STAR KINGS, STARMEN OF LLYRDIS, and others of the same school of space-opera. For what it was, and for what it intended to be, an immensely enjoyable story.

As for the McCauley illustrations, having seen the originals, the printers' proofs, the final published versions, my original judgment still holds—the frontispiece (p. 7) is one of the most abominably bad drawings he has ever done, and the wonderful portrait of Rolf on p. 28 is one of the best he has ever turned out. Smith's cover was bad enough in the original SCIENCE STORIES format, but cut down as it is in present appearance, it is miserable.

As for the three supporting short stories, McGregor's "The Crazy Man" was the only decent one in the lot. The other two would have been better left unpublished.

I join my voice to the (I hope) loud and extensive cheering at the reappearance of the letter column and feature in UNIVERSE. Especially Rog Phillips' CLUB HOUSE, which was always one of

the most enjoyable parts of the old Amazing — indeed, the *only* enjoyable part for the last couple of years of its existence. He gets in a nice plug for the Chicago SF Club in his review of DESTINY, for which we are duly grateful. We had as many as three new members at the last meeting—one of whom was none other than Dave Ish, who is in the Chicago area for the summer.

Well, I won't bother you any more. May UNIVERSE survive for many issues to come . . . And for heaven's sake, print those Finlay covers!!

Sincerely,
Bob Briney
2637 Orrington Avenue
Evanston, Illinois

Sorry to disappoint you, Bob, but those Finlay covers will not be used for some time—several issues, at least. We're trying out a new cover format with this issue. How do you like it? I know, you still want the Finlay covers! Well, stay with us, and you'll eventually see them. In the meantime, we'll see what can be done about getting some Finlay interiors. How's that?—Bea

Dear Rap,,

The last time I wrote you was to AMAZING in the mid 1940's. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then. I have stuck with you through 31 issues of OTHER WORLDS (yea, I know the first couple of them said the editor was Robert N. Webster), four issues of SCIENCE STORIES, and six issues of UNIVERSE that have come out. Having enjoyed science

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fiction for more than fifteen years, as long as I am able to read and you are able to edit I will still be with you.

OKLACON II is to be held September 4th this year and all fans from near-by states that are unable to make the FRISCON are invited to attend. It will take place in Oklahoma City. For reservations $1.00 is to be sent to my address. If you could find room for this information in the next issue of UNIVERSE it will be greatly appreciated.

I have an apology and a word of thanks. In going through the stuff left over from last year's OKLACON, I found a certificate that should have been sent you after the Con in thanks for your help of the art work from UNIVERSE. The art was displayed with the issue of UNIVERSE from which it came and later auctioned off. I was one of the lucky ones and ended up with a very fine drawing. My thanks along with that of the other members of the O.S.F.C.

Would it be possible for you to

"Well, let me put it this way, sir . . . They ain't friendly!"

send us art work again this year? It would be displayed with the issues from which it came and then auctioned as was done last year.

A copy of my fanzine NITE CRY has been sent to Rog Phillips. I hope that the CLUB HOUSE, along with the Letters and Personals are to continue. Rap, you, perhaps more than any other editor have been the editor of the science-fiction fan. You have continued to be personal to us and not draw away. Carrying on the fan features is an indication of this.

The above comments are both personal opinions and the opinions of the O.S.F.C. for which I speak as president and may be published in the Letter section.

Thanking you in advance, I hope you are able to get the notice of OKLACON II in the coming issue of UNIVERSE

Donald A. Chappell
5921 East 4th Place
Tulsa, Oklahoma

The artwork has already been sent to you, Don, and we're glad to be able to help out. Being bi-monthly, this was the first issue in which we could get a notice of the OKLACON II, but perhaps it will reach subscribers and near-by fans in time for them to attend. Best of luck with the con, hope it's a big success.—Bea

Dear Rap,

I read every stfmag I get my hands on, cover to cover. I get the feeling that stf is a rich man's hobby everytime I read the letters. I sure couldn't afford to spend the money on it that some guys do. It seems that nine-tenths of those

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who write (especially in the Personals) are bent on getting every issue of every prozine put out.

Despite this obvious failing, I think I can still qualify as a fan, for without spending too much money I read, talk, defend and live science-fiction. From what I've seen here in Minnesota it seems that we lowly, run-of-the-mill fans are the ones that do most of the "defending" while the aristocrats of the field enjoy stf together on some lofty peak. Following this, it sure seems that we innocents and uninitiated in the finer arts of fandom are pretty important people (considering we also comprise a huge buying group) to the stf magazine business. I don't know what I expect done about it, but it sure makes me feel that at least I've got my foot in a door that's been shut pretty tight by a feeling of exclusiveness on the part of all you "full-time" fans. I'm pretty sure there are lots of others that agree with me.

Mike Barnes
Bovey, Minnesota

You've got a problem there, but I think you'll find it's pretty easy to solve it. So some of the "full-time" fans are exclusive? It may seem that way because they've formed close friendships and have known each other for years personally or by correspondence. But there are many neo-fans in the field today, and more entering all

"Very strange. According to my calculations it shouldn't have detonated for another five minutes."

the time. As a result of your letter in this issue of UNIVERSE you'll undoubtedly receive letters from other fans; perhaps they'll send you samples of their fanzines. You'll build up a group of fan correspondents, and get in touch with near-by fans in your vicinity. You can subscribe to and do work for various fanzines — you'll find lots of them listed in the Club House—and widen your circle of friends in fandom. With the Club House, Personals and Letters as a start, you'll soon be able to establish yourself in fandom to such an extent that you'll have to be careful not to be labeled "exclusive" by still newer fans.

Whether or not you can afford to become a collector of all the stf books and mags, you certainly qualify as a fan—so all you have to do is jump right into fandom and fan activities.—Bea

RUSSIA-OR MARS!

(*Continued from Page* 101)

here. But the principle would be the same.

Let us assume these craft are Russian, coming in to attack with H-bombs. They are over the North Pole when our radar warns us of their approach. Immediately our ring of Nike defenders goes into action, and before the invaders progress 500 miles from the pole, they will be met by the rockets which will destroy 85 percent of them then and there.

But what about the 15 percent. They are enough to destroy many of us. Will they get through? The answer to this is probably yes. We will lose many cities. But it is our last loss. For at the same instant the Nikes are destroying 85 percent of the Russian planes, our own long-range craft (they may be flying saucers!) will be speeding out from a hundred different points, some of them astonishingly close to Russia. It is doubtful if Russian leaders will ever learn just how many of our cities they destroyed, because they will themselves be dead. Science fiction predicts it: American science is incalculably far ahead of imagination! The invader courts nothing but doom from an attack.

Now let's assume it isn't an invader. Let's say it is a flying saucer from Mars, and let's even say it is friendly. This is regrettable, because unless they are far superior to us scientifically, and unless they read this article, they will be destroyed just as were the Russians. The reason: because America has at last set up the "push-button" warfront we've talked about in science fiction for thirty years. And to the unheralded (invader or otherwise) there is automatic disaster awaiting. *R. A. Palmer*

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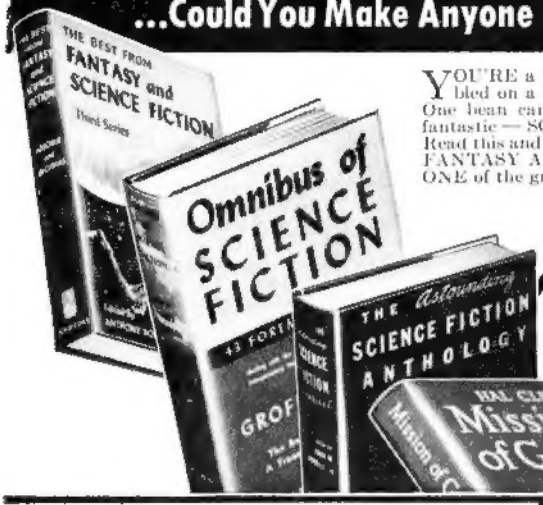
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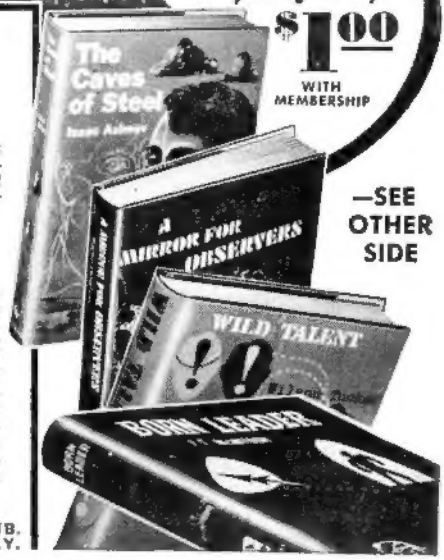

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